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ABSTRACT

This study describes a program designed to increase student academic performance through the use of reading strategies. The targeted population consists of third and fourth grade students in three separate communities located in northern Illinois. All three communities are part of one major metropolitan area, and the status of family income ranges from low to middle levels. Although students continually meet state standards in reading, there is an expectation by district administrators that the students should be reading at higher levels. Evidence that there is room for improvement in this area includes state assessment, comprehension testing, and teacher observation. Analysis of probable cause data reveals that lack of phonetic/decoding skills and vocabulary, curricular changes, lack of parental involvement, minimal prior knowledge, increased bilingual population, developmental difficulties, low self-esteem, and a decreased value of literacy in the home results in low reading skills. Inconsistencies in teacher training and the selection of activities in the reading curriculum contribute to deficiencies in student reading. A review of the solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the settings resulted in the following interventions: teacher training, introduction of reading strategies, monitoring student progress, and the practice of guided reading. Results indicated that the majority of the targeted students revealed an improvement in their ability to comprehend text. Appendixes contain numerous charts of standardized test scores; entrance and exit interview questions; a checklist; the teacher survey; and consent forms. Also included in the appendixes are two Student Practice Pages from "#2131 How to Prepare... Standardized Tests--Int." published by Teacher Created Materials: Comprehension/Story; and Reading Comprehension. (Contains 45 references, 8 figures, and 6 tables.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING STUDENT COMPREHENSION SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF READING STRATEGIES

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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

This study describes a program designed to increase student academic performance through the use of reading strategies. The targeted population consists of third and fourth grade students in three separate communities located in northern Illinois. All three communities are part of one major metropolitan area, and the status of family income ranges from low to middle levels. Although students continually meet state standards in reading, there is an expectation by district administrators that the students should be reading at higher levels. Evidence that there is room for improvement in this area includes state assessment, comprehension testing, and teacher observation.

Analysis of probable cause data reveals that lack of phonetic/decoding skills and vocabulary, curricular changes, lack of parental involvement, minimal prior knowledge, increased bilingual population, developmental difficulties, low self-esteem, and a decreased value of literacy in the home results in low reading skills. Inconsistencies in teacher training and the selection of activities in the reading curriculum contribute to deficiencies in student reading.

A review of the solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the settings resulted in the following interventions: teacher training, introduction of reading strategies, monitoring student progress, and the practice of guided reading.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

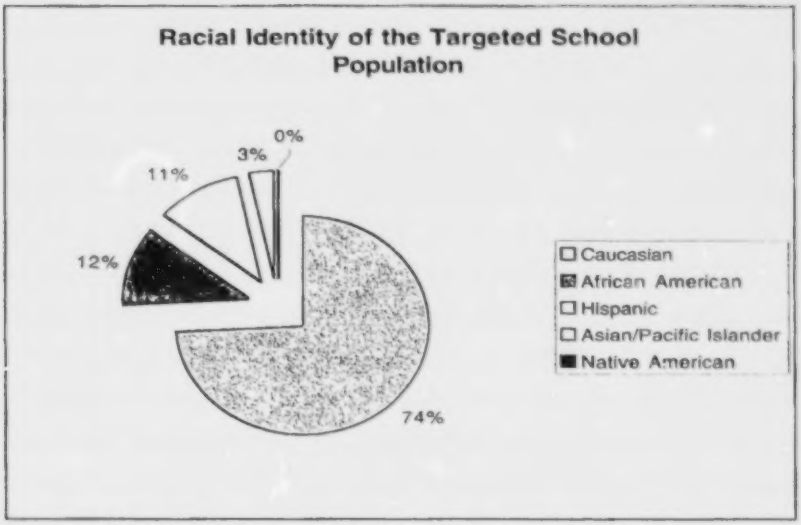
General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted third and fourth grade classes lack reading strategies that interfere with academic performance. This is evident through reading comprehension scores, teacher observations, informal/formal assessments, and monitoring independent reading.

Immediate Problem Context

The total student population at the targeted school is 609 students. The majority, 73.4%, of these students is Caucasian. The minority is made up of 12.0% African American, 11.3% Hispanic, 3.0% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% and Native American population.

Figure 1



Students who have been found to be Limited-English-Proficient make up 4.4% of the student population. Limited-English-Proficient students include students whose first language is not English and who are eligible for bilingual education.

The low-income student population is comprised of families receiving public aid, living in an institution for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible for bilingual education. The percentage of students who meet these qualifications in the targeted school is 7.1%. This is significantly lower than the 36.7% that the state indicates.

A perfect attendance rate of 100% means, that all students attended school every day. The attendance rate at the targeted school is 95.7%. A student mobility rate is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave school during the school year. Each time students move in or out of the district they are counted. The students' mobility rate is 10.1%. Chronic truants are students who are absent from school without a valid cause

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for 10% or more of the last 180 school days. A chronic truancy rate is reported at 0.3% at this school.

The average class size for the targeted school is 24 students. The average class size is a grade's total enrollment divided by the number of classes for that grade. It is reported for the first school day in May. The ratio of male to female students is 1 : 1. The student-teacher ratio by homeroom is reported as 24.2 : 1.

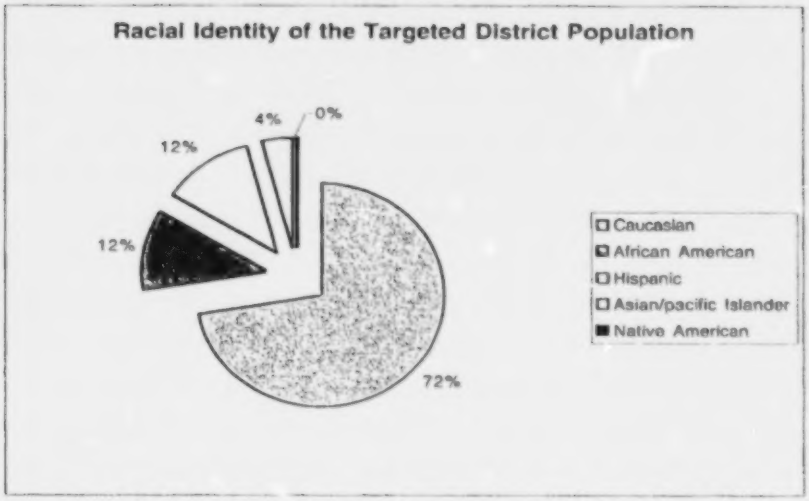
The time devoted to the teaching of core subjects is the average number of minutes of instruction per five-day school week in each subject area, divided by five. In this school the total instructional time is reported as; Mathematics 60%, Science 30%, Social Studies 30%, and English 160%. English includes all language arts courses such as reading, writing, spelling, daily oral language, grammar and phonics.

The total teacher population at the targeted school is 44. There are four male and 40 female teachers. The average years of teaching experience of teachers at the targeted school are 10 years. There are 25 teachers on staff holding a bachelor's degree with no schooling beyond that degree. There are 19 teachers on staff with a master's degree. The principal of the targeted school has 14 years of administrative experience. The assistance principal has three years of administrative experience. The entire certified teaching and administrative staff is Caucasian.

District

The total student population of the targeted district is 1,853 students. The ethnic make up of the district parallels that of the targeted school. The majority, 72.2%, of these students is Caucasian. The minority is made up of 11.8% African American, 11.7% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4% Native American population.

Table 2



Students who have been identified as Limited-English-Proficient make up 4.0% of the student population. Limited-English-Proficient students include students whose first language is not English and who are eligible for bilingual education.

Families receiving public aid, living in an institution for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible for bilingual education are identified as low income. The percentage of students who meet these qualifications in the targeted school is 8.0%.

The attendance rate of 95.7% at the targeted district parallels the targeted school. The student mobility rate is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Students are counted each time they transfer out or transfer in. The students' mobility rate is 14.4%. Chronic truants are students who are absent from school without a valid cause for 10% or more of the last 180 school days. A chronic truancy rate is reported at 0.3% at this district.

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The population of classroom teachers at the targeted district is 126. There are 19.4% male and 80.6% female teachers. The majority, 96.0%, of these teachers is Caucasian. The minority is made up of 1.6% African American, 0.0% Hispanic, and 2.4% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Teacher information includes classroom teachers plus teachers specializing in art, physical education, music, computer, and health. The average years of teaching experience at the targeted district are 12.6. Teachers holding a bachelor's degree with no schooling beyond that degree constitute 43.8% of the teaching staff. Teachers with a master's degree and credits beyond that degree constitute 56.2% of the teaching staff. The average class size for the targeted district parallels the targeted school. The pupil-teacher ratio within the targeted district is 17.5:1. The pupil-certified staff ratio is 12.7:1. The pupil-administrator ratio is 231.6:1.

The average salaries are based on full-time equivalent positions. This is the total of full time positions as well as the combination of part time positions when added together equal full time positions. These averages allow for comparisons among districts. They may or may not reflect the actual paid salaries for the district since some benefit packages are included in the salary, while others expect the teachers to pay for their benefits from their salary. The average teacher salary within the targeted district is $45,260. The average administrator salary within the targeted district is $96,235.

Surrounding Community

The targeted district consists of children from three neighboring towns, but only the community in which the school is physically located will be discussed in this section. The home community is upper-middle class suburban area with a population of 25,862.

86% of the community is Caucasian. It is a residential community with light industry and is home to a few corporate headquarters.

The district is comprised of three schools. The primary building is pre-kindergarten through second grade. The intermediate school is made up of the grades three through five. The middle school is made up of grades six through eight. A superintendent, a director of curriculum, and a business manager administer the targeted district. A principal and an assistant principal administer each school. A psychologist and social worker are also on staff.

The median age of residents in the targeted district is 32.6 years, and the median family income is $55,450. 42% of the community is employed in executive, professional, management or specialist positions. 18% of residents are in blue-collar careers. 33.6% of the adults have an associate/bachelor degree or above. 6.5% of the adults do not have high school diplomas. The percentage of the population below the poverty level is 2.9%. The average home value of 518 homes sold in the year 2000 is $251,348.

National Context of Problem

> "Communication is the lifeblood of society, linking people, things, places, ideas, and meaning to each other in myriad ways. It provides evidence of the human brains ability to create meaning out of experiences-to comprehend and compose the verbal and nonverbal symbols that represent thoughts and feelings. Communication forms the basis of the human social systems, for without the ability to communicate, there would be no such things as relationships, culture, or civilization." (Perry, 1995, p. 87)

According to the national report A Nation at Risk, today's students demonstrate a substantial lack of communication abilities (Perry, 1995). This is one factor that has led to an increase of deficits in literacy among school aged children nation wide. Therefore,

educators recognize that reading is an essential element for success in today's society. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, one in every five American children has significant trouble learning to read and write (Parlapiano, 1999). In studies, by Anderson, as cited by Showers, "Nearly 30% of students lack competence in reading upon completion of the primary grades." (Showers, p. 94)

Reading is the ability to identify symbols, as well as being able to gain meaning from a selected text. There are two major methods through which students are taught to read, whole language or phonics-based programs. Throughout this action research project "whole language" will refer to a meaning emphasis program and "phonics-based" will refer to a code emphasis program. (Perfetti, 1985) Although specific components of these programs differ, the main goal of both is ultimately comprehension.

Learning to read is a very complex process. There are many factors that contribute to a child's success in reading. Some of the factors include: exposure to literature in the home and parental involvement. "Children who acquire a great interest in reading in their homes have an easy time reading in school, and they form the overwhelming majority of those who later become the good readers" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982, p. 9). Because reading is such an integral part of all aspects of school performance, how successful a child is at reading dramatically affects his or her self-esteem. "The way in which learning to read is experienced by the child will determine how he will view learning on general, how he will conceive of himself as a learner and even as a person" (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982 p. 5). These are just two of the factors that contribute to a child's reading success. Socioeconomic status, ethnic diversity, and media influences are also factors.

For decades, politicians have made education and literacy an important issue of their political plans. All schools across the country must commit to the belief that, " Every child deserves that chance to succeed. Schools must join together, sharing successful practices, staff development, and resources to create an environment where success is the norm-for every child" (Wheaton & Kay, 1999).

In order for children across the nation to become successful readers, everyone who influences a child's life must value literacy. Schools need to focus on improving student's comprehension skills through the use of reading strategies.

CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of the problem to which students were able to comprehend their reading, the teacher-researchers administered entrance interviews that included reading fluency test, comprehension pretests and SRI (Student Reading Inventory). In addition, teacher-researchers completed ongoing observation checklists, anecdotal records and reviewed standardized test scores.

Teacher Observation

In the spring of 2001, the teacher-researchers of the two targeted third grades and the three targeted fourth grades discussed reading strategies and materials used in their classrooms. These teachers expressed concerns about students who continue to struggle with reading comprehension. The students in the targeted school were not meeting district expectations on standardized tests (see Appendix A). The teacher observers strongly felt that the students needed a reading program that targeted specific reading strategies that would help improve comprehension. Thus, it was agreed upon by the third and fourth grade teachers that they would focus on the specific reading strategies as outlined in the newly adopted district reading program.

Entrance Interview and Reading Fluency Test

During the first week of school, teacher-researchers at the targeted school administered an entrance interview. The purpose of the entrance interview was to develop a baseline for the students' knowledge of reading strategies. The strategies targeted were: summarizing, predicting/inferring, questioning, monitoring/clarifying, evaluating, and phonics/decoding. Teacher-researchers conferenced with each student in the targeted classes. Students read a selected passage and then were asked questions related to each reading strategy. A rubric was used to evaluate their reading skills (see Appendix B).

One of the components of the entrance interview was a reading fluency test (see Appendix B). The purpose of this assessment tool was to evaluate the number of words read correctly in one minute. The reading passage chosen for the fluency test was taken from the first selection of the third and fourth grade reading anthologies. During the assessment, the teacher-researcher listened to each student read aloud, while recording miscues on a corresponding copy of the reading passage. Miscues occurred when the student's oral reading of a passage differed from the printed passage. Miscues took the form of substitutions, omissions, insertions, reversals, and mispronunciations. The reading fluency test was used as a comparative tool throughout the research project.

Observation Checklist including Anecdotal

Records Throughout this action research project (September 2001 – December 2001), the teacher-researchers used observation checklists, which included anecdotal records of student progress (see Appendix C). The purpose of the observation checklist was to track the student's individual growth over time for each targeted reading strategy.

The checklists were used daily by the teacher-researchers during appropriate class activities. Students observed using the desired strategies were noted and recorded on the checklist. A space was also provided for anecdotal comments. The strategies targeted were: summarizing, predicting/inferring, questioning, monitoring/clarifying, evaluating, and phonics/decoding. The use of each strategy was recorded using the following qualifiers: (+) frequently, (check) sometimes, and (o) not yet.

Teacher Survey

In order to determine the reading instructional materials used by the teachers of the targeted school, the teacher-researchers developed and administered a teacher survey. The survey consisted of five questions detailing the specific methods and materials used in reading instruction. It was distributed to 26 classroom teachers in the targeted school. Twenty-one surveys were completed and returned (see Appendix D). The purpose of the survey was to determine how consistently the district reading materials were used and what supplemental materials, if any, were added.

Student Reading Inventory (SRI)

In order to help determine a baseline reading comprehension measurement for each student in the targeted classrooms and to document any growth in reading comprehension, a student reading inventory (SRI) was administered two times during the 2001-2002 school year (see Appendix E). It was given in mid-September and then again at the conclusion of the study in the third week of December.

The SRI is an interactive assessment tool first introduced to the teachers and students of the targeted schools in the 2000-2001 academic school year. It is a computerized reading comprehension test, which is completed independently by the

students (see Appendix E). It is a tool to aide teachers in their evaluation of student reading levels, instructional needs and appropriate text choices.

> There is no substitute for ongoing documentation and monitoring of learning to determine the order in which skills should be addressed and the level of intensity required to help a child or group of children succeed in a particular area (Strickland, 1998).

There are two parts of the SRI: the student test and the Scholastic Management Suite (SMS).

The student test measures the reading levels of students. It consists of over 3,000 questions relating to fiction and non-fiction passages from children's literature, magazines, newspapers and periodicals. Upon the students' completion of the test, the teacher receives information showing the reading level of each individual student and how it compares to the rest of the students in the class. Each student is assigned a reading level, called a lexile, based on his or her test score (see Appendix E). The student can then access an appropriately leveled reading list and is encouraged to select books that are within or near his or her lexile level.

The second part of the SRI is the Scholastic Management Suite. This is a management tool designed to give teachers a variety of reports and information to help monitor student reading comprehension needs and progress.

Standard Achievement Scores

Standard Achievement scores are used to determine the individual achievement scores of each student. These achievement scores help determine if a student is at or below his current grade level. The district expectation is that 90% of the students will meet or exceed state standards.

Comprehension Pretests

A comprehension pretest was administered to the targeted third and fourth grade students. The comprehension pretest was used as a baseline to help the teacher-researchers monitor student progress throughout the study.

The comprehension pretests were both multiple-choice format. The number of comprehension questions at the third grade level was four. There were five comprehension questions at the fourth grade level (see Appendix F). The comprehension passage increased in difficulty at the fourth grade level. The comprehension score that the students achieved was based on the number of correct responses.

Probable Causes

Research indicates that there are several probable causes for why children in the targeted district are not being more successful in reading comprehension. This failure can be attributed to causes both in the school and in the home.

In the school environment phonics and decoding skills, as well as other specific reading strategies are not being consistently taught as essential elements of the reading/language arts curriculum. In addition, the population of the targeted district has an increasing number of bilingual and learning disabled children.

Coupled with these concerns in the school environment are the issues that can be directly related to the child's home environment. Children in the targeted district are coming to school with limited prior knowledge and experiences on which to build reading comprehension. Also, they are coming from homes in which reading is not modeled, their efforts to develop and improve their reading skills are not supported or encouraged, and reading and literature are not valued.

Factors in the school

The controversy over the best way to teach reading to children has raged for many, many years. The main debate has been over the merits of a whole language type of instruction versus a more phonics, skill based method. There is much evidence to support the strong elements of both methods. A whole language program uses novels as a springboard for reading instruction. It suggests that children learn to read best when reading actual literature instead of contrived or abridged versions of stories. Instruction is based on the novels and the activities associated with them. Skills are usually taught as an additional activity when a need is identified within the context of the novel. The major criticism of the whole language program centers on its lack of direct instruction in phonics and decoding skills.

While a whole language program suggests a whole to part type of instruction, the phonics-based program is more part to whole. It emphasizes the need for students to master reading skills and strategies in order to become proficient readers. Although often linked with 'real' literature through anthologies, its literature component is secondary to skill acquisition. It is often criticized for advocating the teaching of skills in isolation and failing to teach children how to apply those skills during their reading.

Though the debate continues, most researchers and educators today believe that a combination of the two types of instruction constitutes best practice for emerging readers. According to Fielding and Pearson, "Anything less than a well rounded instructional program is a form of discrimination against children who have difficulty with reading." (Fielding and Pearson, 1994, p. 7). The most successful elements of both types of instruction can be combined to help insure a child's reading success. During the reading

of real literature, teachers can guide a child's reading as he uses strategies acquired through direct skill instruction.

For the last eight years the targeted school district has used a whole language, literature based reading series for reading instruction. Instruction under this method was centered on novel studies and little direct instruction of phonics skills or reading strategies was done. Students have been moving through the grades unable to decode when confronted with a new word, unaware of spelling and grammar rules and unprepared to use reading strategies to aide in comprehension. In addition, reading instruction across the district and within grade levels is inconsistent in content, supplemental materials and methods of teaching. This is seen as a very probable cause to the deficits in reading comprehension noted in the targeted district.

Additionally, over the last few years, the targeted district has seen an increase in the number of bilingual and learning disabled children. Educators and researchers agree that a child who is a member of either of these groups is at risk and often has difficulty reading. "But certainly children growing up in poverty, children entering the schools who do not speak English . . . are at risk for having reading difficulties." (Impact of Reading Research, 2000, p .3). A bilingual or non-English speaking child entering a classroom is at a tremendous disadvantage. He has to try to acquire English proficiency in speaking and reading. Reading skills are based on language development. If a child is not proficient in speaking or thinking in English, he will experience great difficulty reading English. Not only will he struggle to identify letters and their sounds, he will probably be deficient in vocabulary and prior knowledge which will help him relate to the content of a story. Also, his prior experiences are likely to be different than the author's

intended audience. This would make it even more difficult for him to interpret meaning and comprehend what he has read. An increase in this population of students could definitely contribute to low reading comprehension scores.

An increase in the population of learning disabled children in the targeted district is also seen as a probable cause for lower than expected reading comprehension scores. In "The Impact of Reading Research", (June 2000, p.4) it was noted that " . . . a Congressional inquiry about the increasing numbers of students in special education classes, . . . found that the primary reason for that is inability to read. Congress had said, 'If this were a disease, it would be an epidemic.'" Although the targeted school district is not unique in its growing numbers of learning disabled children, it is seen as a probable cause for disappointing reading comprehension scores. Learning-disabled students often require more direct instruction and additional time to process and understand material presented or read. They often have difficulty with memory, word discrimination, and recall. These factors and others make it a reasonable supposition that an increase in the learning disabled population of a district can be a contributing factor to lower than acceptable reading comprehension scores.

Factors in the home environment

In a print-rich home where literacy is valued, a child is exposed to books and other printed materials long before he can read them himself. He is frequently given the opportunity to hear stories, nursery rhymes, and poetry and finds pleasure in sharing that time and experience with the reader. He is also given the chance to interact with books himself, holding them, turning the pages, looking at, and commenting on the illustrations, events and characters within the text. When these elements are present, a child's home

environment can provide a strong foundation on which to build reading skills and strategies when he's ready to enter school. Then, by continuing to watch and interact with his parents as role models, he grows up learning the importance of literacy and the enjoyment that can be derived from it. As stated by Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) "Children who acquire a great interest in reading in their homes have an easy time reading in school, and they form the overwhelming majority of those who become the good readers." (p. 9) Conversely, a child who is deprived of these experiences, opportunities and role models at home finds himself sorely lacking in the foundational elements needed to build and sustain literacy in school. He is behind from the moment he enters the classroom. He must try to construct a growing knowledge of the skills and strategies of reading upon an unsteady foundation that is missing essential building blocks. His attempts to learn more are understandably hampered by this weakened foundation. In this way, his lack of prior knowledge can affect his ability to read and comprehend.

In addition, a child who enters school with limited experiences and exposure to the world is also at a disadvantage in the area of reading comprehension. Most written material brings a message to the reader that goes beyond the literal meaning of the text. Strategies like inference and prediction can be used to find additional meaning in a piece if a child has sufficient background knowledge on which to draw. He needs to have been given many opportunities to explore and examine the people, places and things around him. A child who has had these opportunities can connect with the author and create a deeper understanding of what he is reading. If he has been to a carnival, a museum or a zoo he will be much more capable of relating to these settings and bringing additional

depth and meaning to a story that happens in one of those places. If he has felt the soft fur of a rabbit or waded through a frigid creek he will be able to use those sensory experiences to better connect to a story that includes them. However, a child who has not been exposed to these experiences will not have the background with which to make deeper connections. He will miss out on the more subtle elements of the story. This lack of experience may therefore contribute to decreased reading comprehension.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

"Reading is essential to success in our society" (1998 p. 1) is the straightforward, opening statement of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council. It clearly states the belief of an overwhelming majority of researchers and teachers in the field of reading. Reading is not just a skill learned and used by school children. It is used to gain information, accumulate knowledge, and communicate throughout life. Reading is the road that will lead a child toward his goals whatever direction he chooses to travel. The importance of reading and therefore, the importance of good reading instruction cannot be underestimated.

Good reading instruction can be characterized as both formal and informal. Informally, a home environment rich in literacy and reading role models starts a child on his way to being a reader. In his early years he is introduced to and immersed in activities involving phonemic awareness and letter-sound recognition. He becomes aware of the significance of letters put together to make words and words carefully assembled to make sentences. It is at this point that comprehension becomes a significant goal of reading. No longer having to focus on decoding words and sentences, the child can begin reading for understanding and ultimately, enjoyment. However, research

shows that he now needs to be taught specific reading strategies to help insure successful comprehension of what he is reading.

Beginning in the earliest grades, instruction should promote comprehension by actively building linguistic and conceptual knowledge in a rich variety of domains, as well as through direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing the main ideas, predicting events and outcomes of upcoming text, drawing inferences, and monitoring for coherence and misunderstandings. (Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1998) (Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council)

Having specific reading strategies at his command while reading will give a child the tools that he needs to fully comprehend whatever text he chooses to read. Research supports the idea that most children do not learn these strategies on their own. Direct instruction in how and when to use them is necessary.

There are a growing number of children who are having difficulty comprehending what they read. Research has shown that when children are taught specific reading strategies and how to use them, their ability to comprehend what they read increases. A study conducted by Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, and Schuder (1996) found supporting evidence for using a strategies instruction approach to teaching reading. After a year of strategy instruction, there was a significant difference between the strategies-instructed group and the control group. The strategies-instructed students were scoring higher on standardized measurements of reading comprehension and decoding skills, had made more divergent and in-depth interpretation of what they had read, and had demonstrated larger recall of daily lessons (Taylor, Grave, Van den Broek, 2000, p. 45). Six reading strategies were included: phonics/decoding, predict/infer, questioning, monitor/clarify,

summarize, and evaluate. The following synopses of the literature concerning teaching these reading strategies provide support for them as effective tools for increasing reading comprehension.

Long before entering school, most children have been building a foundation for learning to read. Through frequent exposure to oral and written language they have acquired an awareness of words as a form of communication. Although they may have been given no formal instruction, they are familiar with books and have observed the process of reading. The final step is their introduction to the formal instruction of reading strategies.

The first few years of a child's education are critical to his ability to read. During these years, a child must master the phonics skills, which are the foundational building blocks of reading. Phonics is the sound-symbol relationships of written language. Researchers suggest that phonics is an essential component for reading and comprehension. Typically in kindergarten and first grade, teachers use many activities to help children use, manipulate, and understand sound-symbol relationships (Daniels, Hyde, Zemelman, 1998, p. 33). Once children have learned the basic sound-symbol relationships, they must then progress to the next level, which is the decoding of words.

According to Itzkoff, "Phonics decoding to sound and then to words and meaning is not instantaneous" (Itzkoff, 1996, p. 37). Teachers must teach children how to use their decoding skills to make sense out of the words they are reading. There are several tools that the teacher must provide to enable children to begin climbing the scaffolding of reading development. One tool that allows a child to progress toward the next level is phonemic awareness or chunking. It is the ability to recognize groups of letters that make

one sound. Another tool is recognizing rhyme or the similar sound patterns in words. For example, a child who has learned to recognize and read the word *bat*, can then also recognize and read the words *cat*, *rat*, and *sat*. The more tools, or ways of decoding that the teacher can give the child, the more resources he will have to break the code of words that he is trying to read. As a child learns to recognize phoneme chunks within the text, rhyming and other strategies, he progresses toward the ultimate goal of reading for meaning.

Decoding and Phonics

As a child begins to gain experience with these skills, the goal of reading extends beyond decoding toward comprehension. The child's decoding skills can now be used as a reading strategy.

> Strategies differ from skills in that skills are often conceived of as automatic procedures that do not require thought, interpretation, or choice, while strategies are often seen as conscious plans under the control of the reader, who must make decisions about which strategies to use and when to use them . . . strategy instruction stresses the reasoning processes that readers go through as they interact with and comprehend text. (Comprehension II: Skills and Strategies)

Decoding becomes one of the strategies that the child uses in his overall search for meaning in a text. The child no longer expends all of his energy on the decoding, but rather begins to focus on the meaning of the words. "Phonics reading may be slow, but it can be a useful tool that can lead gradually to greater speed of reading and the automatic transmission of simple reading material to deeper comprehension" (Itzkoff, 1996, p. 38). As the child progresses through these learning stages, he draws upon his experiences to connect letter symbol relationships with meaning. It is those connections that take him another step closer to comprehension. Comprehension can be viewed as a cycle in the

reader's mind. It begins with recognizing the word and discovering its meaning. It then moves forward by relating the word to prior knowledge and experience. The reader then takes the experience back to meaning, to embellish and enhance it, and make the connections that aide in complete comprehension. Although phonics is a relatively small part of the entire reading program, it is a key building block in the foundation of reading and reading comprehension.

Predicting and Inferring

In addition to using phonics as a reading strategy to increase comprehension, children must also be taught the strategies of predicting and inferring. These strategies, although separate and distinct, are both essential to building a better understanding of the text. Prediction is the more elementary strategy of the two, which can lead the reader toward the more cognitive strategy of inference. The more experience a child has with the prediction strategy, the greater his ability for inferential reading.

Prediction is often used at the primary level as a way of introducing the text and creating interest. At this level, the illustrations are a very important element of this strategy. Illustrations give the non-reader or very early reader clues and insights into what might be ahead in the story. At this point, much of the child's experience with 'reading' is based on listening to material that's read to him or interpreting very simple text. According to an article in American Educator, "Early childhood programs can develop children's language by giving them many opportunities to discuss their experiences, make predictions, and discuss past events in small groups" (American Association for colleges for teacher education et al, 1998, p. 55). The child should be given ample opportunities to observe the illustrations as well as the printed text while

listening to a story. He should be encouraged to comment on what he sees, hears and reads and how it relates to what he already knows. This is the very beginning stage of predicting and starts the child thinking in a different way. His ability to make connections between what he is seeing and reading and his prior experience and knowledge set the stage for the further development of the predicting and inferring strategies.

As children approach the intermediate grades, predictions involve more character and plot development while encouraging critical thinking and analysis of these elements. Inferring draws even more on the cognitive and the metacognitive strengths of the reader. The child who can infer not only can read the words on the page, but also learns to read 'between the lines'.

> Metacognition is the knowledge of when to apply such strategies as a function of text difficulty, situational constraints, and the reader's own cognitive abilities. A combination of both reading strategies and metacognition play important roles in the reading process (Taylor, Graves, Van den Broek, 2000, p. 10).

A child's ability to use prediction and inference as effective reading strategies is directly related to his prior knowledge and life experiences

A child who is raised in a stimulating environment enriched with books and conversation, opportunities and experiences, has an increased ability to predict, infer and comprehend the author's full intent. He can draw on his experiences and prior knowledge to make sense of and relate to the more subtle information provided through his reading. However, a child who lacks life experiences and background knowledge, who has had little opportunity to discuss what is happening in his world and how he feels about it, will have a much more difficult time predicting and inferring. He will have a

much weaker foundation upon which to build understanding. The child may initially have to accept a more concrete and literal interpretation of what he is reading. It then becomes the teacher's challenge to supply the background knowledge necessary for the students to be able to practice predicting and inferring. A child's ability to predict and infer helps him better relate to and comprehend what the author is saying. It also increases his investment and enjoyment of what he is reading. It allows him to make the connections between his experiences and the text, and ultimately brings real understanding to what he has read.

Questioning

Questioning is a natural or innate strategy used by a child to gain knowledge. He begins to practice it at a very young age and enters school already adept at asking questions about the world around him. Teachers can then build upon this foundation to help the child create an effective strategy for reading comprehension. "Effective classroom questions promote relevance, encourage ownership, help students interpret their observations, and link new learning to what students already know (Deal and Sterling, 1997, p. 61).

Most of the questions that can be taught in the classroom to promote comprehension fall into two basic types. Skylight Educational Publishing Company refers these to as fat and skinny questions. Fat questions require the child to think about the meaning of the text, infer, and search for further information. Skinny questions are factual, can be found directly in the text, and require no interpretation or inference. These questioning strategies, once learned in language arts, can then be applied across the curriculum. The teacher must have a large repertoire of questions asked to solicit

many different kinds of responses from the children.

According to Graves, Van den Broek, and Taylor, in The First R: Every Child's Right to Read, the use of the traditional *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* questions will illicit different responses from the reader. For example, a *what* question can be found directly in the text, as opposed to a *how* question that asks the reader to examine the sequence of events in the text (1996). These traditional types of questions can be easily related to the categories of fat and skinny questions previously mentioned. By varying the types of questions asked, the teacher can solicit a larger spectrum of responses and a deeper understanding of the text.

Once the teacher has a command of many different types of questions, his task becomes two fold. First, he must teach the children to use different types of questions to improve their reading comprehension. Most children are familiar with the skinnier questions like, "Who is this story about?" or "Where does this story take place?" However, they must also become familiar and confident with the fat questions that usually involve finding out 'how' or 'why' a character acted or felt a certain way. The teacher must give them many opportunities to use and discuss the use of these questions. He must also point out the strengths and appropriate uses of each type.

The second part of the teacher's task involves using and modeling the questioning strategy himself. He must question the children often throughout the day to solicit information, stimulate thinking and assess what the children are learning. Through his use of this questioning strategy, the teacher must also model the different types of questions that he wants the children to use. While encouraging divergent thinking and responses from the children, he will be showing them how they can enhance and assess

their own understanding through questioning. An integral part of learning throughout a child's life, questioning can also be a very effective strategy for improving reading comprehension

Monitor and Clarifying

Another way to help a child improve his reading comprehension it to teach and encourage him to monitor and clarify his reading and thinking. Very good readers may already be monitoring and clarifying what they have read without conscious thought or understanding of the process. However, the beginning, struggling or average reader needs to be taught and reminded of this strategy to be sure that he is getting the most meaning out of a text. Children apparently fail at a wide variety of problem-solving tasks because they do not, or cannot, assess their own knowledge or their progress on the task (Brown, 1978). They fail to recognize and increase in difficulty level, to plan ahead, or to monitor the outcomes of their performance (Perfetti, 1985, p. 78). Good readers dissect and investigate the specific elements of these strategies to increase their understanding of reading comprehension.

Monitoring for understanding and clarifying what has been read involves the child asking himself the question "Do I understand what I've read?" Teachers need to encourage children at all levels to ask that question often to be sure that they are getting the maximum understanding from what they have read. If the answer to the question is 'yes' then a child should continue reading. If, however, the answer is 'no', there are several things that he can do to aide in his understanding. According to Graves, Van den Broek, and Taylor, children need to think aloud as they read and ask questions such as, "What is the author trying to say?" or "What is the author talking about?" These

questions can help students gain meaning from the text, rather than searching for a specific answer (1996, p. 102).

A child who comes to a word or a phrase that he does not understand should be encouraged to use two clarifying techniques: rereading and reading ahead. Rereading the sentence or passage to help him clarify what the author was trying to say is a good technique to help find meaning. Too often children will be tempted to just overlook a troublesome word or sentence and continue reading. If they continue reading without monitoring for understanding, they may loose the meaning of the text completely. Reading ahead, just a few words, is another technique that can aide in the search for understanding. A child should be encouraged to read ahead when he comes to a word that he is having trouble understanding or decoding. Putting the word into context with the sentence might help in discovering its meaning. If that technique does not help with understanding, he must continue to try other strategies.

Along with the techniques of rereading and reading ahead, the strategies of monitoring and clarifying are intricately intertwined with the other reading strategies of phonics/decoding, questioning, predicting and inferring. In order for a child to monitor his understanding and clarify what is being said, the child must first be able to decode the words. If he then comes across a word that he does not know, he can use the decoding strategies to help him figure it out. He can then monitor his decoding and understanding of that word by reading it in context to see if it makes sense. Monitoring and clarifying will help him answer the question, "Does this word make sense?" If the newly decoded word does make sense, he can then continue with his reading. However, if the meaning is still not clear, he must use other strategies to clarify the meaning. By monitoring, he is

stopping to find meaning in the text.

Questioning is a major part of monitoring and clarifying. In order to extract maximum meaning from what is being read, the child must be questioning himself throughout the process. These questions may come in many forms. They could be skinny questions about details of the story or vocabulary or they could be fat questions about why the character acted the way he did or what the author was trying to say. The beginning or struggling reader often does not realize that he should be asking himself these questions. He may be concentrating so hard on decoding or fluency that he neglects to ask himself what the text is really about. He needs to be taught and reminded to stop during his reading and take time to reflect and digest the meaning of the piece. He especially must be taught and reminded to ask himself often, "Does this make sense?" The average reader and even the better reader can also benefit from reminders that they should stop and reflect on their reading. Through metacognition they can extract much more meaning and significance from their reading by making connections to their prior knowledge and experiences.

Inferring and predicting take some time and thought and should be done throughout the reading of a text. Again, they require metacognition on the part of the child. They create a deeper understanding and enjoyment of the text and are an important part of the monitor and clarify strategy for better reading comprehension. Teachers need to continue to remind children to use these strategies throughout their reading.

Summarizing

An additional reading comprehension strategy that can be used by a child to monitor and clarify his reading is summarizing. Summarizing is retelling a story in a

concise way. Summarizing a story shows that the child can identify the main elements of a story and put them in a sequential form. He demonstrates understanding by the elements he chooses to include in his summary and by the ones he leaves out. He has to retain enough of the meaning and details to paint a clear picture of what happened in the story. He also has to be able to clearly distinguish between the important elements of a story and the less significant details that add depth, but are not necessary to the overall meaning.

The elements that are often included in a summary are the main characters, the setting, and the problem and how it was solved. "When children read in small groups, use of strategies often drove their interpretive discussion of text. Thus students might report on the images they formed as they read, the points that seemed confusing, and their personal summaries" (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 45). When the child concentrates on distinguishing these major elements and adding just a few details to enhance them, he has created the summary and captured the basic meaning of the story.

Evaluating

Evaluation is another reading comprehension strategy that is useful to a reader. It is a reading strategy that covers a wide scope of cognitive, comprehension questions that the child can ask himself and consider during reading and after he has finished a story. The child can evaluate the story by asking himself how it made him feel and why it might have made him feel that way. "After reading, teachers help students savor, share, and reconstruct meaning, and build connections to further reading and writing" (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 1998, p. 33). Evaluation also encourages the child to consider what the author might have been thinking or feeling. Opinion is also a part of

the evaluation process. The child should consider whether or not he agrees with the author's point of view. All of this questioning and evaluating may be very new to most children. The teacher again needs to teach and encourage evaluation by modeling. Questions that make the child think about the author's intent and meaning will stimulate evaluation. Discussion between readers will also encourage evaluation as a means of comparing and contrasting different ideas.

> ... there were many confirmations that teaching students to carry out individual strategies could affect what they acquired from text. These successes led to thinking that multiple comprehension strategies might be taught profitably, if the teaching was metacognitively embellished (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 43).

The ultimate goal of teaching these strategies to a child is to help him become a better reader, to increase his understanding and therefore the enjoyment and information that he gets from reading

In order to ensure effective implementation of these strategies teachers must be afforded proper training. "Substantial resources need to be devoted to research on teacher education that helps teachers develop into effective literacy educators who can deliver effective balanced instruction" (Pressley, 1998, p. 273). Good reading instruction is dependent on a teacher's knowledge of and ability to appropriately model the strategies necessary for reading comprehension. It cannot be assumed that teachers automatically know the current best practices in reading instruction. Teachers have a large variety of background knowledge and instruction on which they base their teaching methods. Their varying ages, educational background and personal teaching styles contribute to the differing approaches to reading instruction. In addition, what is accepted as "best practice" is continually changing with research and experience. These factors make it apparent that there is a need for continuing teacher development.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on reading strategies, during the period of September 2001 to December 2001, the third and fourth grade students from the targeted classes will increase their ability to use reading strategies, as measured by reading comprehension scores, teacher observations, informal/formal assessments, and monitoring independent reading.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

A. Pretest and posttest will be administered to the students.

B. Several reading strategies will be introduced such as: phonics/decoding, predict/infer, monitor/clarify, questioning, summarizing, and evaluating.

C. Students will be engaged in several reading activities such as: independent reading, guided reading, literature circles, and buddy reading.

D. Teacher will monitor student practice of the various reading strategies.

E. Students will reflect on their use of each reading strategy.

Action Research

Prior to week one, teacher training will be completed on the new language arts curriculum.

I. Week One:

A. Parental consent form sent home and returned

B. Beginning of the year comprehension pretest

II. Week Two:

A. Beginning of the year interview with each student (5 students a day for the week)

B. Student Reading Inventory (SRI) test

C. Introduction to reading comprehension strategies: phonics/decoding, predict/infer, monitor/clarify, questioning, summarizing, evaluating

III. Week 3-10:

A. Students will read one Reading Counts book a week

B. Students will take one Reading Counts quiz a week

C. Students will meet in guided reading groups each week

D. Weekly comprehension test

E. Daily teacher read aloud

F. Buddy reading

G. Students will practice different reading strategies

The reading series used at the targeted school is an integrated language arts program. Each lesson has a strategy focus that guides student learning. The program is structured around specific reading strategies that are continually practiced, reinforced, and assessed throughout the series. This approach is new for the students who are used to a whole language program.

IV. Week 11:

A. Student Reading Inventory (SRI) test

B. Comprehension posttest

V. Week 12:

A. Final interview with each student

C. Compilation of research data

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the student's improvement in reading comprehension, the students were given pre and post comprehension tests, a beginning of the year and an ending interview that included a reading fluency test and SRI. In addition, student self-monitoring and teacher observation will assess the effectiveness of the reading strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve academic performance by the teaching of reading strategies in third and fourth grade classes. In order to introduce the specific reading strategies, the targeted district purchased a phonics-based reading curriculum. The teacher-researchers received training in how to best implement the new reading series and followed the series closely. In addition, the students were required to independently read books and take computerized reading quizzes. Other components of the study included guided reading groups, literature circles, teacher read alouds, reading fluency tests, student reading inventory tests, ongoing teacher observations and assessments.

The targeted district expressed a concern with the current reading levels of the students. This concern was a result of recent state standardized test scores. Teachers in the targeted school also expressed a concern with the lack of reading strategies taught through the former whole language reading program. The five classes involved in this action research consisted of two third grade and three fourth grade classes, which included a wide range of reading abilities. The students' academic abilities range from special needs to gifted. The teacher-researchers agreed that the introduction and

application of concrete reading strategies would increase the students reading abilities, as well as their overall academic performance.

Teacher Involvement

The teacher-researchers were formally trained to use the newly adopted reading program. They then collaborated on how to most effectively use the reading program to meet the needs of the students. The teacher-researchers agreed to concentrate on the following reading strategies taken from the newly adopted reading program. These strategies are decoding/phonics, predicting/inferring, questioning, monitoring/clarifying, summarizing, and evaluating. The teacher-researchers agreed to teach and model these strategies. They also provided frequent opportunities for students to practice these strategies.

Student Involvement

During the first week of the implementation of the action research project, all targeted students were given a comprehension pretest (see Appendix F). The comprehension pretests consisted of grade appropriate passages accompanied by multiple choice comprehension questions. This pretest was used as baseline data to measure growth of the students' ability to comprehend text.

The parents of the targeted students were informed of the action research via an informational letter (see Appendix H). The purpose of the letter was to inform the parents of the basis for the research and the interventions that would be used. The letter also served as a consent form for their children to participate in the research. All students enrolled in the five classes were given consent to participate in the action research project.

During the second week of the research, the teacher-researchers conducted an entrance interview of the targeted students (see Appendix B). The interview included a reading fluency test, during which the students read a passage from the reading series. The teacher-researchers timed the students' reading for one minute, and marked words that were incorrectly decoded. At the end of the timed minute, the teacher-researchers counted the number of words read correctly. This data was used to monitor the students' decoding progress throughout the action research project. The interview also included a set of questions that the researchers asked each student. These questions revealed the students' ability to apply each of the strategies to be taught during the action research project. The teacher-researchers recorded the students' responses. The teacher-researchers collaborated and determined a rubric to be used for grading responses. This data was used as baseline data to monitor progress throughout the research project. It was also compared with an exit interview administered at the end of the research period.

Also during the second week, a student reading inventory (SRI) was administered (see Appendix E). This is a computerized reading comprehension test that determines students' reading levels. The students read passages from the computer and answered multiple-choice questions. The program individualized each test for each student by increasing or decreasing the level of difficulty depending on the students' responses. The students were assigned a lexile score based on their responses. The students were encouraged to read library books within their reading levels. The SRI was retaken at the end of the research project and progress was noted. These scores will be reported later in this chapter (see Table 5 and Table 6).

The desired reading strategies were also briefly introduced to the targeted students during the second week. Through the newly adopted phonics based reading series, the students were introduced to and practiced a new strategy each day of the week.

The next phase of the action research project occurred during the third to tenth weeks. The students studied the key reading strategies during this time period. The key strategies were phonics/decoding, predicting/inferring, monitoring/clarifying, questioning, summarizing, and evaluating. The students used the phonics based reading program to read authentic stories and apply the desired reading strategies. The students were given opportunities to apply each strategy separately and in conjunction with other strategies. Some of these opportunities included, but were not limited to, graphic organizers, journaling, written response, large group discussion and small group discussion.

In addition to reading stories from the reading series, the students practiced the strategies as they read independently during a daily reading workshop. The students read at least one book at their lexile level. They were monitored and assessed by taking Reading Counts quizzes on the books they read. The Reading Counts program allowed students to monitor their understanding of independent reading. After the students read books appropriate to their lexile level, they took quizzes on those books. Each quiz consisted of ten multiple-choice questions. The students successfully passed a quiz when they answered at least seven out of the ten questions correctly. If students did not pass the quizzes on their first attempt, they had two additional opportunities to pass the quizzes. The teacher has the ability to reset the standard for the number of questions that

the students are required to answer correctly to pass the quiz. This information was all documented and available for the teacher to monitor and evaluate.

During this phase of the research project, the teacher-researchers also conducted teacher read alouds. This activity provided opportunities for the teacher-researchers to model each of the key reading strategies. It also provided more opportunities to engage the students in large group discussions, where they could reflect on their progress and application of the key reading strategies.

The teacher-researchers continued to monitor the students and collect data through the use of weekly checklists. The checklists allowed the teacher-researchers to record whether each student used each key strategy 'frequently', 'sometimes', or 'not yet'. These checklists were dated and used to monitor student progress throughout the research (see Appendix C).

During week 11 the Student Reading Inventory (SRI) and comprehension posttests were re-administered (see Appendix E and Appendix G). The results from the SRI and comprehension pretests and posttest were compared in an effort to document reading improvement.

During the last week of the research project, the teacher-researchers completed data collection by conducting an exit interview (see Appendix B). This interview mirrored the entrance interview given at the beginning of the research project. The students were asked to read a grade appropriate passage. The teacher-researchers timed each student and marked any words that were incorrectly decoded. This activity provided a second fluency score, which was then compared to the entrance fluency score. The scores indicated that the students' reading fluency had increased. After the students read

the passage, they were asked questions to help monitor their application of each key strategy.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to determine the students' improved reading abilities, the teacher-researchers used the following assessment tools: the SRI tests, comprehension pretest and posttest, and the entrance and exit interviews, which included the fluency test.

All students were interviewed in September and November. The purpose of interviewing the students was two fold. First, it allowed the teacher-researchers to monitor changes in students' fluency. The third grade students' September fluency scores were compared to the November fluency scores (see Table 3). The fourth grade students' September fluency scores were compared with the November fluency scores (see Table 4).

Table 3

Third Grade Fluency Test		
	Number of Students	**Percentage**
Increased by 10 or more words	28	68%
Increased by up to 10 words	5	12%
Stayed the same	8	20%
Decreased by 10 or more words	0	0%
Decreased by less than 10 words	0	0%

In September the third grade students' fluency scores gave the teacher-researchers a baseline that was compared with their exit fluency scores. The data presents that the majority of the students had increased their fluency. Students that had increased their

words read correctly per minute by reading 10 or more words made up 68% of the third grade targeted students. 12% of the students increased their words read per minute up to 10 words. Three students read at exactly the same fluency rate, which made up 20 %. There were no students that decreased their rate of fluency.

Table 4

Fourth Grade Fluency Test

	Number of Students	Percentage
Increased by 10 or more words	53	77%
Increased by up to 10 words	9	13%
Stayed the same	3	4.3%
Decreased by 10 or more words	0	0%
Decreased by less than 10 words	3	4.3%

In September the fourth grade students' fluency scores gave the teacher-researchers a baseline that was compared with their exit fluency scores. The data presents that the majority of the students had increased their fluency. Students that had increased their words read correctly per minute by reading 10 or more words made up 77% of the fourth grade targeted students. 13% of the students increased their words read per minute up to 10 words. Three students read at exactly the same fluency rate, which made up 4.3 %. There were no students that decreased their rate of fluency by reading 10 or more words less than their entrance interview. Only 4.3% of the students decreased their rate of fluency up to 10 words per minute.

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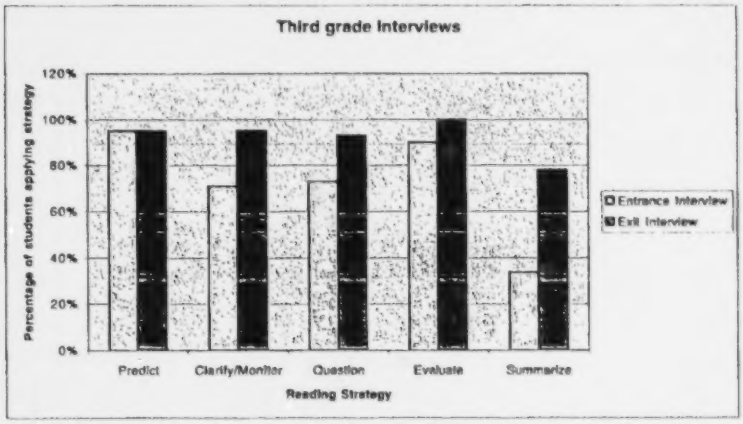
The phonics and decoding reading strategies had a positive impact on the students' fluency results. Other factors that may have affected the students' improvement were maturation and familiarity with the text.

The second reason for administering the entrance and exit interviews was to monitor the student's application of each reading strategy. The teacher-researchers created a rubric to record the students' knowledge and/or application of each key reading strategy. The third grade entrance interview results were compared with the exit interview results (see Figure 5).

Figure 5



The third grade entrance interviews showed that of targeted third grade students, 95% were able to predict what a story was going to be about given the title. The teacher-researchers accepted responses that were consistent with the title. For example, if the title included the words 'a dog', then a correct student prediction had to include a dog. The entrance interview also determined that of the targeted third grade students 71% could clarify and monitor their reading. The students were asked a comprehension question from the passage. Correct answers determined the students' application of this reading strategy. Of the targeted third grade students 73% generated a question to

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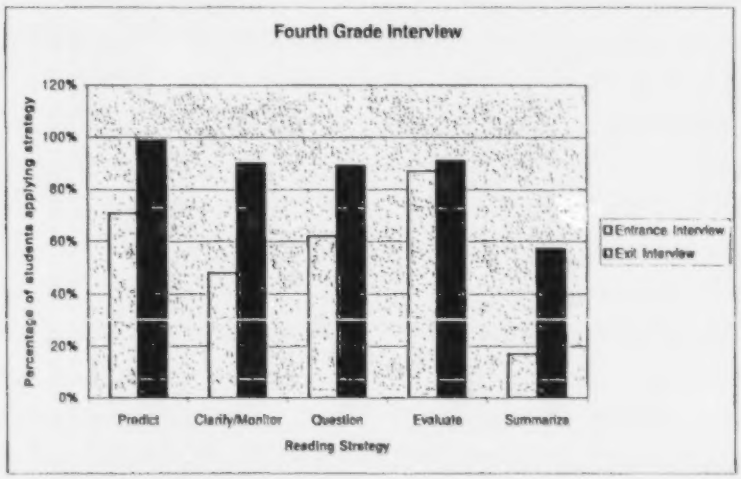
monitor their understanding. In order for the students to show they could evaluate their reading, they were asked if the passage was clear and easy for them to understand. Of the targeted third grade students 90% were able to evaluate their reading. Finally, the targeted third grade students were asked to summarize the important events of the passage, and 34% exhibited summarizing skills.

The third grade exit interview results were compared with their entrance interview results. After being taught the six key reading strategies and allowed practice, the students' application of each strategy increased. The percentage of students that predicted what the story was going to be about stayed the same at 95%. Clarifying and monitoring increased from 71% to 95%. The application of the questioning strategy increased from 73% to 93%. Evaluation increased from 90% to 100%. Summarization increased from 34% to 78%.

The fourth grade entrance interview results were compared with their exit interview results (see Figure 6).

Figure 6



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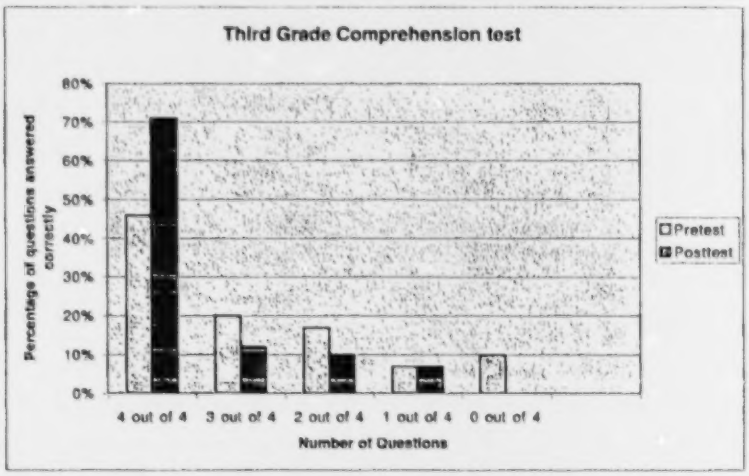
The fourth grade entrance interviews showed that of thetargeted fourth grade students, 71% were able to predict what a story was going to be about given the title. The teacher-researchers accepted responses that were consistent with the title. For example, if the title included a proper noun, a correct student prediction had to include a character. The entrance interview also determined that 48% of the targeted fourth grade students could clarify and monitor their reading. The students were asked a comprehension question from the passage. Correct answers determined the students' application of this reading strategy. Of the targeted fourth grade students 62% generated a question to monitor their understanding. In order for the students to show they could evaluate their reading, they were asked if the passage was clear and easy for them to understand. Of the targeted fourth grade students, 87% were able to evaluate their reading. Finally, the targeted fourth grade students were asked to summarize the important events of the passage, and 17% exhibited summarizing skills.

The fourth grade exit interview results were compared with their entrance interview results. After being taught the six key reading strategies and allowed time to practice them, the students' application of each strategy increased. The percentage of students that predicted what the story was going to be about increased from 71% to 99%. Clarifying and monitoring increased from 48% to 90%. The application of the questioning increased from 62% to 89%. Evaluation increased from 87% to 91%. Summarization increased from 17% to 57%. The instruction of these six key reading strategies had a positive affect on the students' scores. Other factors that may have affected their scores were double exposure to the same interview. This would have caused the students to be familiar with the text and the questions. Another factor may

have been the teacher-researchers subjectivity and interpretation of the rubric used to score the children's responses.

A comprehension test was administered to the targeted third and fourth grade students twice during the action research project. These tests were determined by grade level and matched grade level reading. The comprehension test was administered in September and re-administered in December. The results of the September and December scores were compared in an effort to show improvement in reading comprehension at grade level (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).

Figure 7



The results of the third grade comprehension scores show that overall comprehension improved. Of the targeted third grade students the percentage of students who answered all four questions correctly increased from 46% to 71%. The pretest scores show that 46% of the students answered four out of four questions correctly. The pretest scores show that 20% of the students answered three out of the four questions correctly, giving a total of 66%. The posttest indicates that the percentage of students who answered at least three out of four questions correctly increased to 83%.

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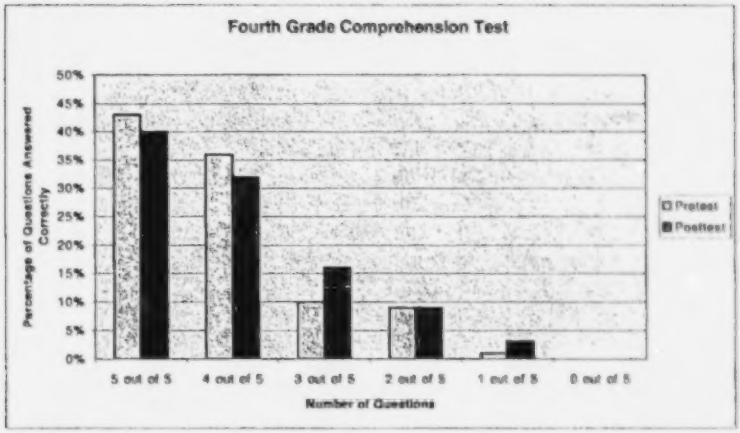
Figure 8



The results of the fourth grade comprehension test show that the majority of the students did not improve in their ability to comprehend text. The targeted fourth grade students who answered five out of five comprehension questions correctly decreased from 43% to 40%. The pretest scores show that 36% of the students answered four out of five questions correctly. The posttest scores show that 32% of the students answered four out of five questions correctly. This shows a 4% decrease. The percentage of students who answered three out of five of the questions correctly increased from 10% to 16%. The percentage of students who answered two out of five of the questions stayed the same at 9%. The percentage of students who answered one out of five questions correctly increased from 1% to 3%. These scores show that the fourth grade students did not improve on their ability to comprehend, this could be attributed to the fact the fourth grade teacher-researchers used a different pretest than posttest. The third grade teacher-researchers used the same pretest and posttest. Therefore the data collected in the posttests for the third and fourth grades could not be compared.

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A student reading inventory (SRI) was administered to the targeted third and fourth grade students in September and in December of this research project (see Appendix E). These tests were used to determine independent reading levels. The results of the September and December scores were compared in an effort to show improvement in independent reading (see Table 5).

Table 5

Third Grade SRI Pretest and Posttest Scores

	Number of Students	Percentage
Increase	33	80%
Same	3	7%
Decrease	5	12%

The results of the third grade SRI show an increase in the students' independent reading ability. The targeted third grade students' scores show that 80% of the students increased their independent reading comprehension and skills. There were 12% of the targeted students that decreased their independent reading scores. This decrease in scores may be due to chance factors (e.g. illness, unlucky guesses, family situations). Most likely, if the 12% of students whose scores decreased were tested again, then the chance factors will not be present. (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 1999)

Table 6

Fourth Grade SRI Pretest and Posttest Scores

	Number of Students	Percentage
Increase	54	78%
Same	2	3%
Decrease	13	19%

The results of the fourth grade SRI scores show an overall increase in the students' ability to comprehend and apply reading skills while reading independently. Of the 69 targeted fourth grade students 78% of the students improved their independent scores. Only 3% of the students' scores stayed the same, while 19% of students scores decreased from the pretest to the posttest. This decrease may be due to extraneous variables. Some of these variables include chance factors, maturation, and statistical regression.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data from the entrance and exit interview, comprehension pre and posttest, student reading inventory, and observation checklists, the majority of targeted students revealed an improvement in their ability to comprehend text. The reading strategies that were implemented throughout the course of this study appeared to have had a positive effect on the students' ability to comprehend. The teacher-researchers observed the students utilizing the targeted reading strategies throughout the curriculum. Students consistently applied the specific strategies during

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literature circles and flexible reading groups. During sustained silent reading time, the students showed improvement in their ability to read independently.

Previously, the students of the targeted district did not meeting district reading expectations. This study was undertaken to give students additional tools with which to successfully understand their reading material. By the end of the study, through the use of the targeted reading strategies, students exhibited higher levels of comprehension.

Through the exit interviews, the targeted students demonstrated a significant improvement in their ability to apply the specific reading strategies. The entrance interview revealed that 45% of the third grade students exhibited the specific strategies, while 53.2% were able to effectively use these strategies by the end of the study. 14.2% of the fourth grade students exhibited the specific strategies at the beginning of the study, while the exit interview stated a 69.6% increase in the use of strategies.

The primary intervention in this study was the teaching of the targeted reading strategies. These reading strategies gave the students an increased ability to comprehend reading material. This increase in the third grade results was supported by the pretest, posttest, observation checklists and SRI scores. Due to the fourth grades' use of a posttest that differed from the pretest, the results of the comprehension test could not be compared with the third grade posttest scores. However, the increase in the fourth grade comprehension scores was supported by the pretest, observation checklists and SRI scores. All other testing procedures were consistent between the third and fourth grades. As their comprehension improved, they exhibited greater confidence in their independent reading ability. Students were encouraged to practice and utilize each strategy in several different situations including literature circles and guided reading. Students were

observed using the reading strategies to improve their comprehension throughout all areas of the curriculum. It is concluded by the teacher-researchers that giving students ample opportunities to independently practice these reading strategies increases their reading comprehension.

The teacher-researchers recommend the continued use of the specific reading strategies to increase student reading comprehension. Providing students with opportunities to practice these strategies increases their ability to comprehend. The findings of this study show that students are capable of applying the knowledge gained from instruction in reading strategies and improving their confidence and independent reading comprehension skills.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A

Standardized Test Scores

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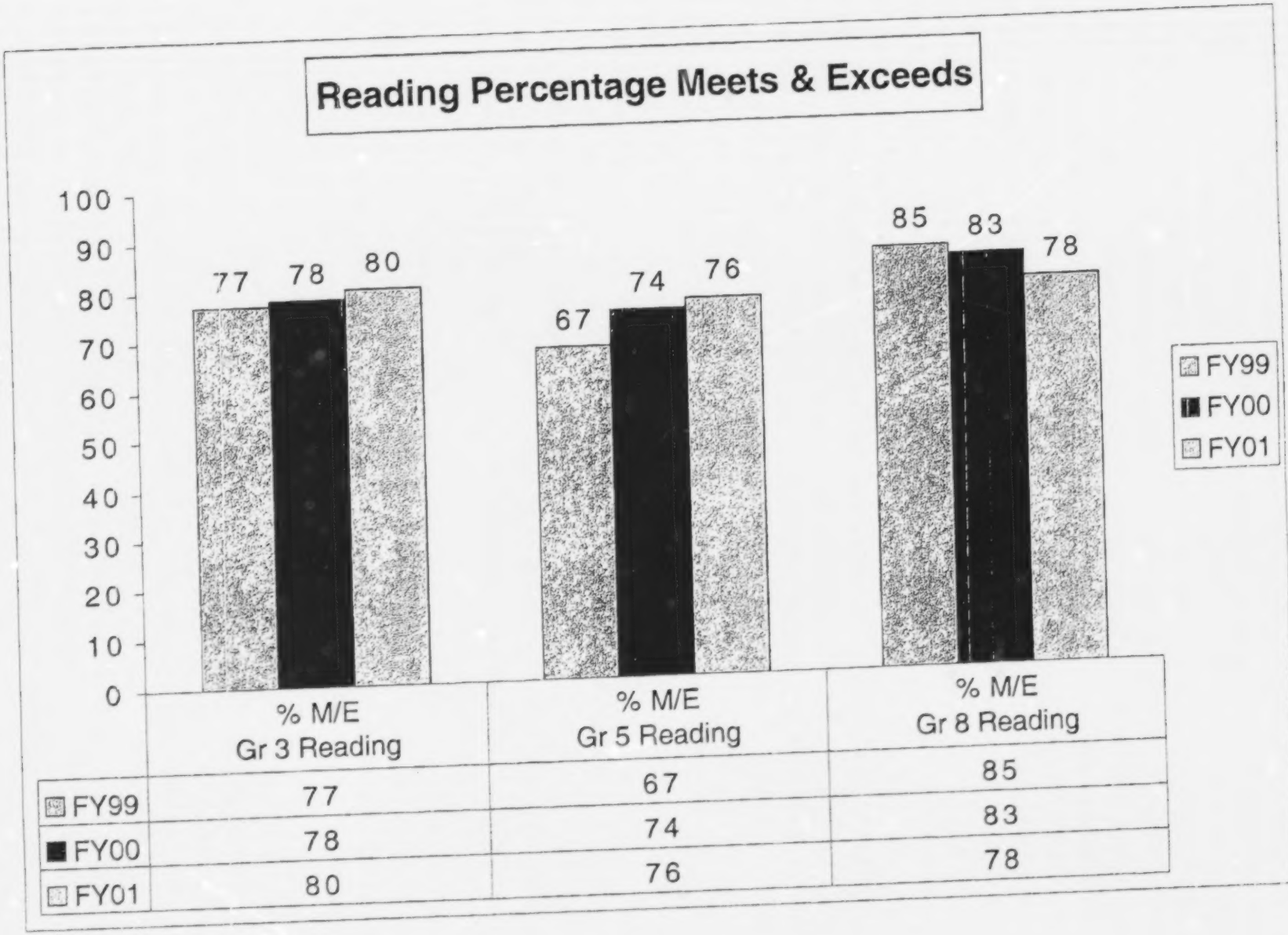

	% M/E Gr 3 Reading	% M/E Gr 5 Reading	% M/E Gr 8 Reading
FY99	77	67	85
FY00	78	74	83
FY01	80	76	78

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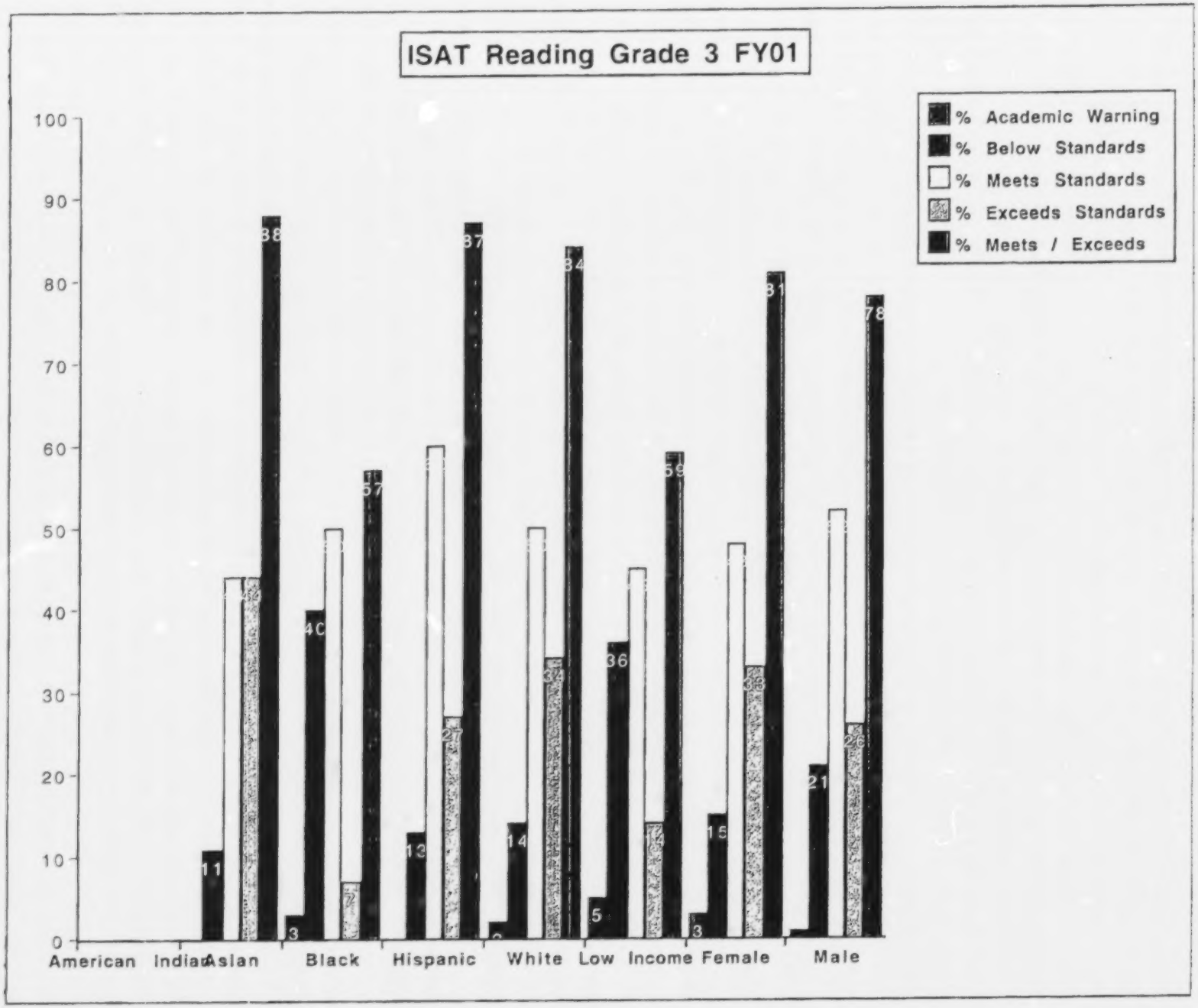

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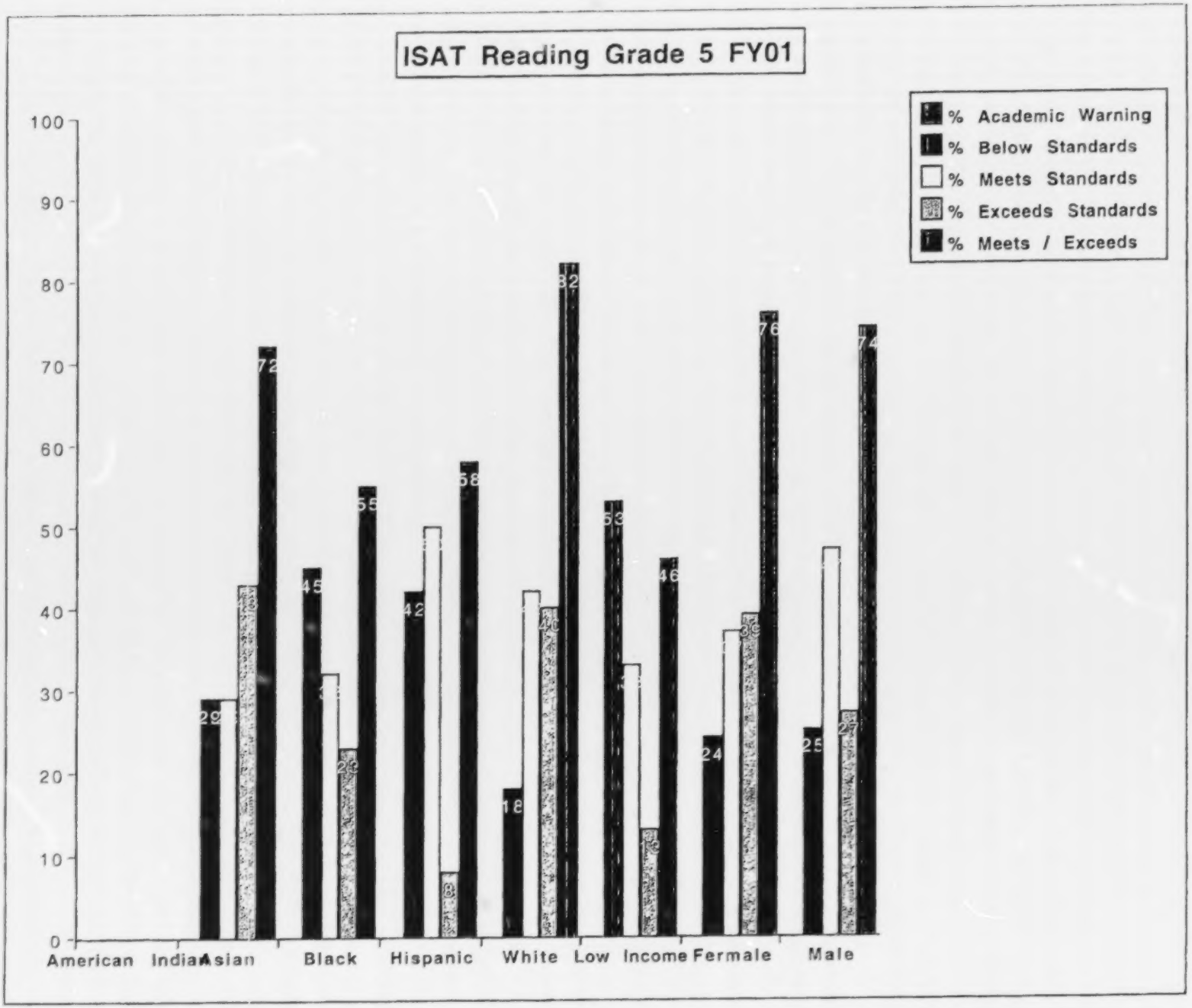

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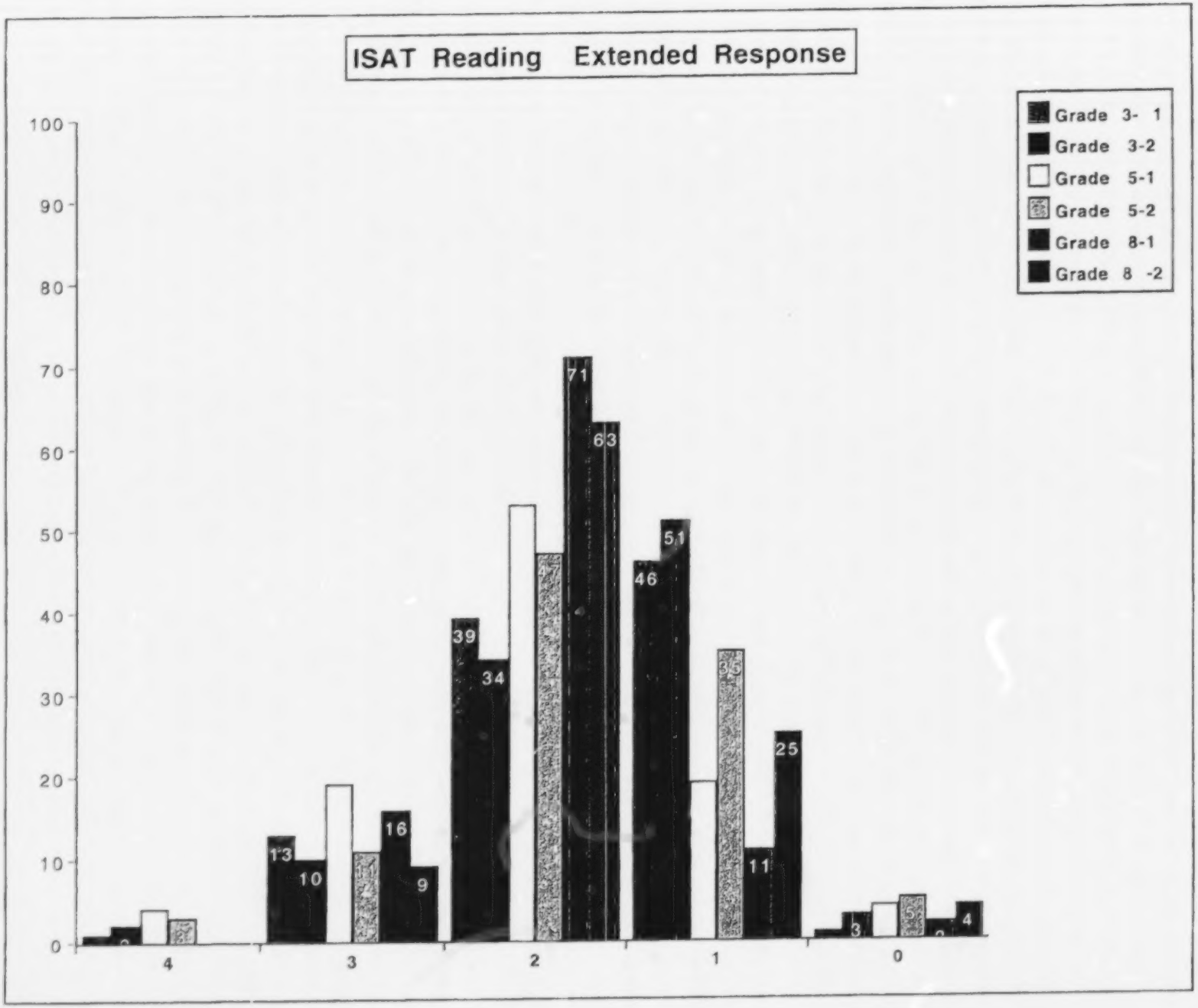

ISAT Reading Extended Response
4
3
2
1
0
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Grade 3- 1
Grade 3-2
Grade 5-1
Grade 5-2
Grade 8-1
Grade 8 -2

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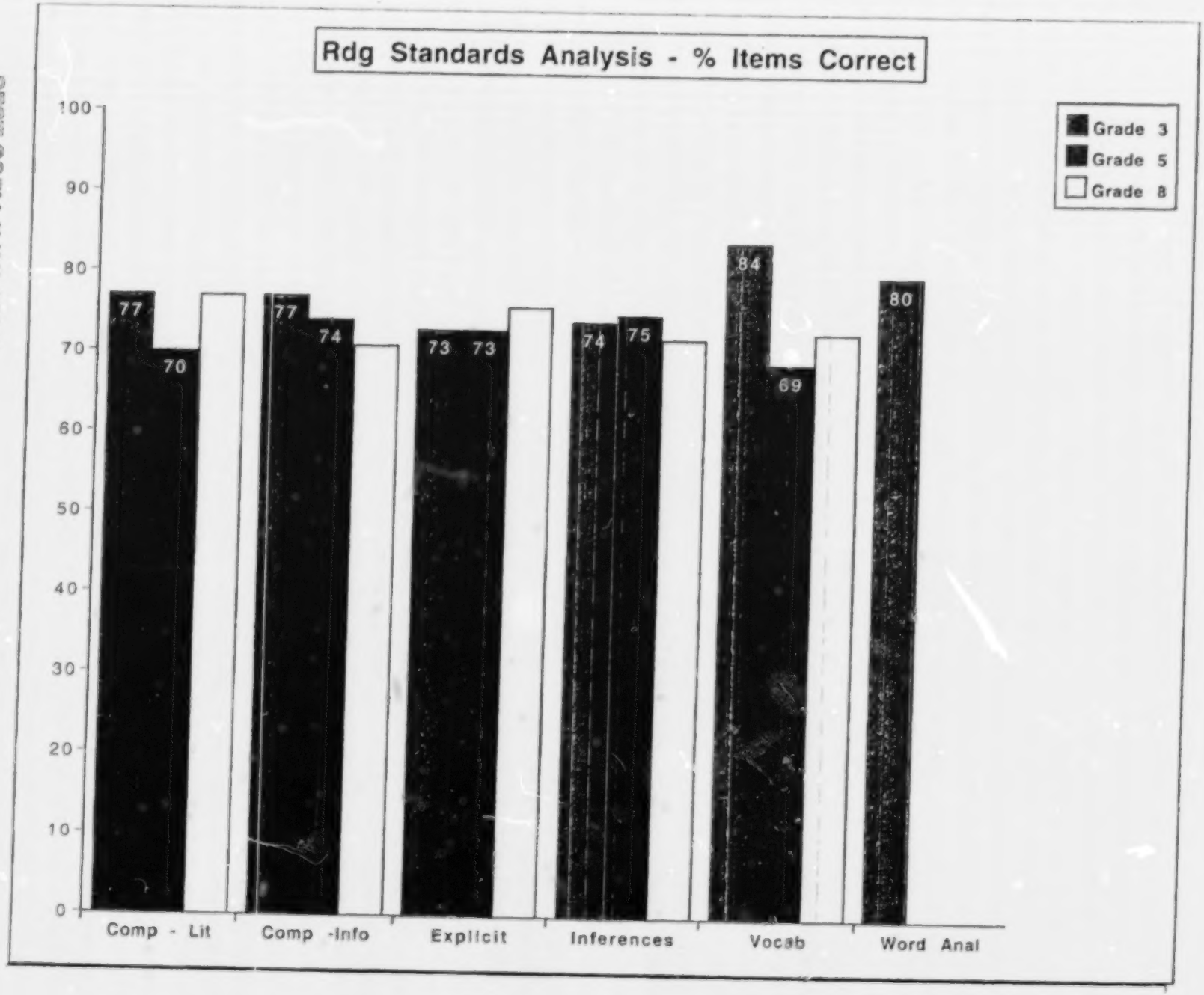

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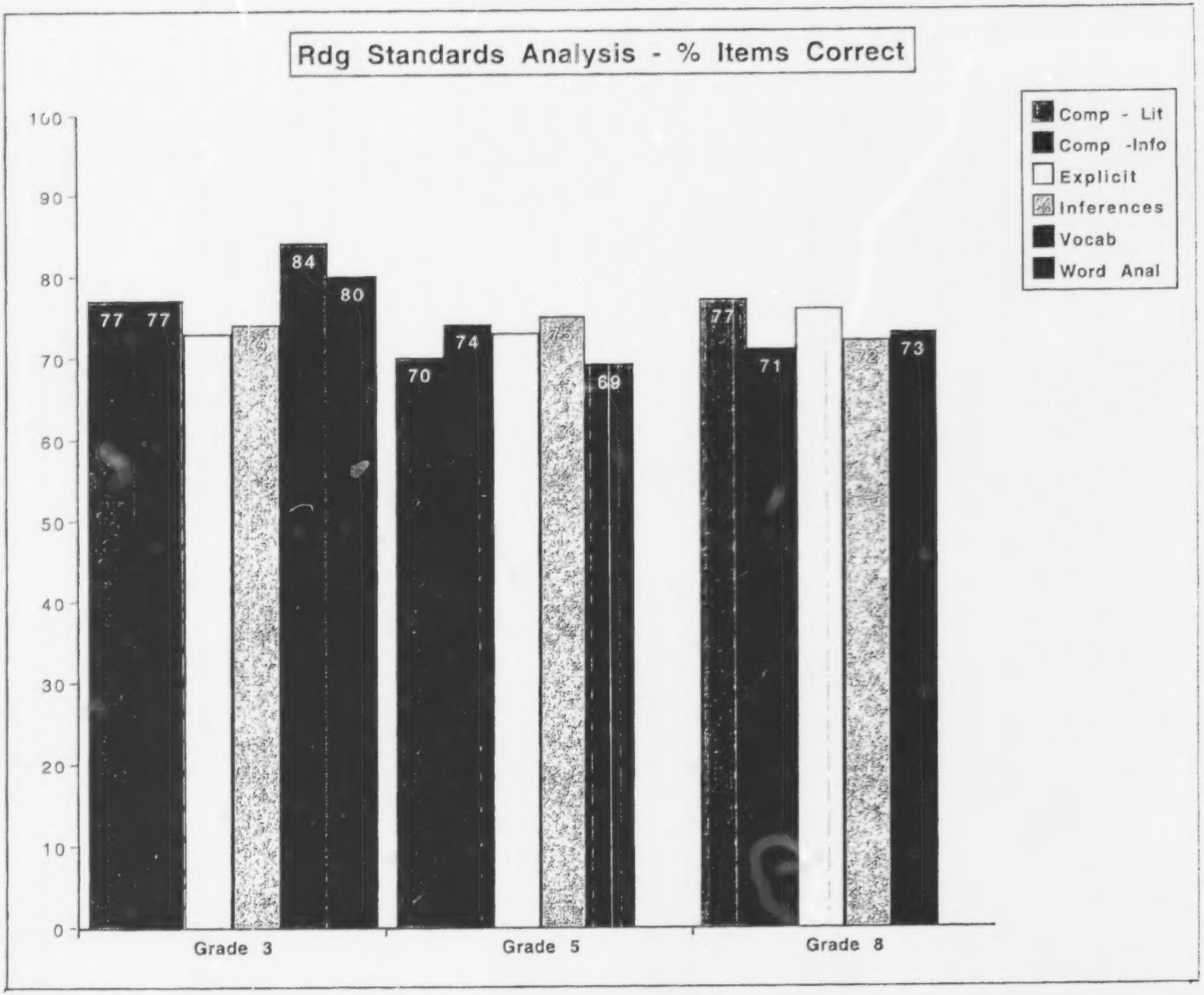

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Appendix B

3rd and 4th Grade Entrance and Exit Interview

3rd Grade

Wendell and Floyd were in trouble. That morning a giant squid had trapped them in the boy's restroom for almost an hour, causing them to miss a math test. Their teacher, Ms. Gernsblatt, had been furious.

"We have no luck, " said Floyd.

Just them, Mona Tudburn entered the office. Mona was the new girl in their class.

"I'm trying to find the Lost and Found, " she said. "I lost my lucky hat."

Wendell and Floyd glanced at each other. "That's strange," said Wendell. "We were just talking about luck."

"We don't have any," Floyd said.

"Neither do I," said Mona. "At least not without my hat."

Third Grade Entrance and Exit Interview

The student will read the short passage below. After the student is finished he/she will answer a series of questions about the passage.

Wendell and Floyd were in trouble. That morning a giant squid had trapped them 14
in the boy's restroom for almost an hour, causing them to miss a math test. Their teacher, 31
Ms. Gernsblatt, had been furious. 36
"We have no luck, " said Floyd. 42
Just them, Mona Tudburn entered the office. Mona was the new girl in their class. 57
"I'm trying to find the Lost and Found, " she said. "I lost my lucky hat." 72
Wendell and Floyd glanced at each other. "That's strange," said Wendell. "We were just 86
talking about luck." 89
"We don't have any," Floyd said. 95
"Neither do I," said Mona. "At least not without my hat." 106

Questions

Predict
Read the title of the passage and predict what it will be about.

Clarify/Monitor
Why did Wendell and Floyd miss their math test?

Questioning
Ask me a question about an important event in the passage.

Evaluating
1. Is the writing clear and easy to understand?

Summarize
1. Summarize the important events in the story so far.

Phonics/Decoding
Teacher will monitor student decoding by taking note of any mispronounced or skipped words.

4th Grade
Akiak

Akiak knew it. The other dogs knew it, too.
Some had run it many times and others
had never run it at all. But not a dog wanted to be left behind. It was Iditarod Race Day. 1,151 miles
wind, snow, and rugged trail
lay ahead, from Anchorage to Nome. Akiak had led the team through seven
races and knew the trail better than any dog. She had brought them in
fifth, third, and second, but never won. She was ten years old now. This
was her last chance. Now, they must win now.

Crack! The race was under way. One by one, fifty-eight teams took off
for Nome.

Fourth Grade Entrance and Exit Interview

The student will read the short passage below. After the student is finished he/she will answer a series of questions about the passage.

AKIAK

Akiak knew it. The other dogs knew it, too.	9
Some had run it many times and others	17
had never run it at all. But not a dog wanted	28
to be left behind. It was Iditarod Race Day.	37
1,151 miles of wind, snow, and rugged trail	44
lay ahead, from Anchorage to Nome. Akiak	51
had led the team through seven races and knew	60
the trail better than any dog. She had brought them in	71
fifth, third, and second, but never won. She was ten	81
years old now. This was her last chance. Now, they	91
must win now.	94
Crack! The race was under way. One by one,	103
fifty-eight teams took off for Nome.	110

Questions

Predict
Read the title of the passage and predict what it will be about.

Clarify/Monitor
Why is this Akiak's last chance to win the race?

Questioning
Ask me a question about an important event in the passage.

Evaluating
Is the writing clear and easy to understand?

Summarize
Summarize the important events in the story so far.

Phonics/Decoding
Teacher will monitor student decoding by taking note of any mispronounced or skipped words.

Teacher Survey

Appendix C

Observation Checklist

ON YOUR OWN

Directions: Select the skills you want to observe and write them on the five slanted lin top of the numbered list.

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Teacher: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Target Skills: _____

Ratings:
✤ = Frequently
✓ = Sometimes
O = Not Yet

NAMES OF STUDENTS	Predict and infer	Phonics and decoding	Monitor and clarify	Question	Evaluating	Summarize	COMMENTS
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
11.							
12.							
13.							
14.							
15.							
16.							
17.							
18.							

Appendix D

Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey

Please return to Mrs. Orcutt by March 23

1. What reading series do you primarily use?

   Pegasus Other

2. What reading materials, if any, do you use as a supplement? Please list below.

3. Which of the following reading strategies do you teach? Please circle all that apply:

Inferring	Monitoring/clarifying
Predicting	QAR's
Decoding	Opinion Proof
Analyzing	Sequencing
Summarizing	Written journal reflection

4. From the following reading strategies, circle the three you use most often.

Inferring	Monitoring/clarifying
Predicting	QAR's
Decoding	Opinion Proof
Analyzing	Sequencing
Summarizing	Written journal reflection

5. Approximately how many hours a week do you spend teaching, practicing, or modeling reading strategies with your students across the curriculum?

_____ 0-3 hours
_____ 4-6 hours
_____ 7-9 hours
_____ 10-13 hours
_____ More than 13 hours

Appendix E

Student Reading Inventory Example Tests

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

Student:
Grade:
Test Date:
Student Lexile: 741

Q: There have been great hitters ever since baseball began. But in the early days the game was different. The ball was heavier, so it didn't carry very far. Pitchers could spit on it or scrape it, getting it wet and dirty. As the innings passed, the ball grew hard to see. Unlike today, the umpire didn't toss it from the field.
Baseball has <<>>.

✓changed
grown
aged
declined

Kramer, S. A. BASEBALL'S GREATEST HITTERS. New York: Random House, Inc., 1995.

Q: When he was a little boy he asked questions about everything. He continued to ask questions when he was a man. He didn't give up when he was told that no one could answer those questions. He just went to work and found the answers himself. His search led to a whole new way of looking at the universe in which we live.
He was a <<>>.

✓success
father
stranger
writer

Hammontree, Marie. ALBERT EINSTEIN: YOUNG THINKER. 1961. Reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 1986.

Q: Once you learn the basics, you can decide for yourself if you want to race or do freestyle BMX. A lot of young riders do both. But you have to be prepared to take some falls. You will get some
Some riders get <<>>.

✓hurt
prizes
money
medals

Knox, Barbara. NEW ACTION SPORTS: BMX BICYCLES. Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 1996.

Q: Of course, great hitters do more than just get the bat on the ball. They swing with power and drive in run after run. When the game's on the line, they're the players who always come

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

Great hitters are <<>>.

✓ dependable
fast
alert
positive

Kramer, S. A. BASEBALL'S GREATEST HITTERS. New York: Random House, Inc., 1995.

Q: He raced down the hall. Suddenly his feet slipped out from under him. He waved his arms wildly as he tried to keep his balance, then flopped down on the floor.

He ran and <<>>.

✓ fell
skipped
jumped
played

Sachar, Louis. THERE'S A BOY IN THE GIRLS' BATHROOM. 1987. Reprint, New York: Scholastic Inc.,

Q: In the forest they had been protected from the sun, but now it beat down on them, unobstructed, and soon Rudi's body was bathed in sweat. His pack seemed to grow heavier. Now and then he stumbled. With every step he was learning that it was one thing to roam the mountains, free and unencumbered, and quite another to be a porter carrying a thirty-pound load

Rudi was <<>>.

✓ tired
happy
confused
quiet

Ullman, James Ramsey. BANNER IN THE SKY. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Q: Alex was worried, but he was excited, too. He could chew another piece of gum and invisibly trail along for fun. The Gang wouldn't know he was there, and he'd be able to watch everything. And

No one would <<>> him.

✓ see
touch
harm
consider

Cuyler, Margery. INVISIBLE IN THE THIRD GRADE. 1995. Reprint, New York: Scholastic Inc., 1996.

Q: Then, when I did begin to learn all these new, exciting things, I wanted to share them. I'm the youngest in my family with an older brother and sister. Neither of them went to school here, only I did. Well, my brother, forget it. He only cared about himself. Like if I said something to him about earth science, because that's my favorite subject, he changed the topic and told me about his work, mechanics. He tried to compete with me to show that he knew more than I did. My sister was all involved with her work, and then her husband, so I couldn't bother her.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

No one wanted to <<>> to me.

✓ listen
read
sing
come

Bode, Janet. NEW KIDS IN TOWN: ORAL HISTORIES OF IMMIGRANT TEENS. Danbury, CT: Grolier Inc.

Q: Crickets have two big eyes. Each eye is made up of many tiny eyes. They let the cricket see in many different direction at the same time, but a cricket's vision still isn't very good. In fact, crickets rely more on their ears to protect them from danger. Few enemies can sneak up on a cricket. You know that if you've ever tried to catch one.
They rely on their sense of <<>>.

✓ hearing
taste
touch
smell

Berger, Melvin. LET'S-READ-AND-FIND-OUT SCIENCE®: CHIRPING CRICKETS. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998.

Q: "It's very dark," Mama whispered as they stood in the yard with their blankets and bundles of food gathered in their arms, "and we can't use any kind of light. I'll go first--I know the way very well--and you follow me. Try not to stumble over the tree roots in the path. Feel carefully with your feet. The path is uneven."
Listen to Mama's <<>>.

✓ advice
story
crying
radio

Lowry, Lois. NUMBER THE STARS. 1989. Reprint, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1990.

Q: Barbara hurried back to Little Bit, passing the panting, sweaty horses. The pony had been given enough rope to reach the grass at her feet, and she was eating greedily. Barbara ran her hand down the pony's damp leg, feeling the muscle. I hope it's nothing serious, she thought. I hope she is not permanently lame! She lifted the leg and looked at the bottom of the hoof. There, wedged in the frog--the soft spot in the center of the foot--was a stone. Barbara flicked the stone free.

✓ correct answer
— student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

She <<>> the pony.

✓ helped
fought
rode
poked

Massie, Elizabeth. DAUGHTERS OF LIBERTY: BARBARA'S ESCAPE. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc.,

Q: They began dancing again. What's with us? he wanted to ask her. If you and I are just supposed to be friends and nothing more, why did you give me that dirty look when I asked you if you wanted to dance with Ed? And why should I be glad you didn't want to?

He was <<>>.

✓ confused
dazed
joyful
forgetful

Christopher, Matt. TIGHT END. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981.

Q: Awed, unique, and proud were three words that she had written on page seven of her green notebook. She kept lists of her favorite words; she kept important private information; and she kept things that she thought might be the beginnings of poems, in her green notebook. No one had ever looked inside the green notebook except Anastasia.
The green notebook was <<>>.

✓ personal
plain
strange
empty

Lowry, Lois. ANASTASIA KRUPNIK. 1979. Reprint, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1993.

Q: Sun takes my plate to the sink and Mom's to the sink. He clears off all the dishes and puts warm food from the stove pots on a plate in the low-heat oven. So it will stay warm for Dad. Dad may eat when he comes home or he may not, depending on how he feels. But we always keep food warm for him.
We are <<>>.

✓ thoughtful
tired
convinced
rescued

Hamilton, Virginia. ARILLA SUN DOWN. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1976.

Q: In the end there was nothing for John Hancock to do but call for his carriage and his driver. The two men took their seats and rolled sedately away to a neighboring town. (Eventually they found a swamp to hide in.) It was not a heroic escape, but it was an escape. The only thing Samuel Adams regretted was that he'd left his watch behind.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

They found <<>>.

✓ safety
relatives
friends
food
Fritz, Jean. WHY DON'T YOU GET A HORSE, SAM ADAMS? 1974. Reprint, New York: Scholastic Inc.,

Q: At least they allow me to write. Indeed I believe they think my writing is something extraordinary. Each time I take out my copybook and quill, I see looks of approval pass from one

They <<>> my writing.

✓ appreciate
memorize
influence
condemn
Osborne, Mary Pope. DEAR AMERICA: STANDING IN THE LIGHT, THE CAPTIVE DIARY OF CATHARINE CAREY LOGAN. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1998.

Q: I heard my mother moving around in her study and knew she must be trying to catch up on some of the work she'd missed that day. From Anna's room came the sound of scales. As usual, she was using the last hour before bedtime to practice her violin. I didn't hear the baby. He must have been asleep in my mom's room, in the crib we'd borrowed from Watson.
I was <<>>.

✓ listening
agreeing
shouting
sleeping
Martin, Ann M. THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB®: ABBY AND THE MYSTERY BABY. New York: Scholastic Inc.,

Q: Fans in Vancouver have fallen in love with Bryant for a couple of reasons. First, he's an exceptional basketball player. In his rookie season he averaged 13.3 points and 7.4 rebounds per game. He was one of the top rookies in the NBA. But there is more to this success story than mere talent. Bryant is also one of the most likable players in the league. For a first-round draft pick who seems

Bryant is <<>>.

✓ admirable
clumsy
vain
dull
Layden, Joe. THE RISING STARS OF THE NBA. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997.

Q: A hogan is the traditional home for Navajos. It is an octagonal (eight-sided) building with a stove in the middle and a chimney through the center of the roof. The door always faces the east. The reason is so the sun can shine through the door in the morning and make sure you are not sleeping too much.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

All hogans are <<>> the same way.

✓ constructed
painted
furnished
commissioned
Roessel, Monty. KINAALDÁ: A NAVAJO GIRL GROWS UP. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company,

Q: Garnet saw a small object, half-buried in the sand, and glittering. She knelt down and dug it out with her finger. It was a silver thimble! How in the world had that ever found its way into the river? She dropped the old shoe, bits of polished glass, and a half dozen clamshells she had collected and ran breathlessly to show Jay.
Garnet was <<>>.

✓ amazed
bored
sensible
frightened
Enright, Elizabeth. THIMBLE SUMMER. 1938. Reprint, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1987.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

Student:
Grade:
Test Date:
Student Lexile: 266

Q: We took a trip to the beach.

We sat by the <<>> .

✓ water
roof
stove
street

Cherrington, Janelle. SEE THE SEA. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997.

Q: Jane had a ball and a bat. Jane liked to play baseball. She liked to pitch the ball. She liked to hit the ball. She liked to run.

She <<>> baseball.

✓ enjoyed
saved
finished
missed

Selection from THE GAME by Bobby Lynn Maslen. Copyright © 1987 by Bobby Lynn Maslen. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

Q: I'm quick as a cricket. I'm slow as a snail. I'm as small as an ant. I'm as large as a whale.

I can be <<>> things.

✓ many
fun
mean
old

Wood, Audrey. QUICK AS A CRICKET. London: Child's Play (International) Ltd.

Q: Alberto's back hurts. His neck hurts. His hands are wrinkled from the hot water.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

He is <<>>.

✓ sore
cold
short
fast

Keller, Rosanne. THE RACE. Syracuse, NY: Laubach Literacy International, 1990.

Q: The Arizona desert is like an oven. There is no shade. Only cactuses and thin bushes. But Luis and the three other men keep walking.

It is <<>>.

✓ hot
early
wet
loud

Keller, Rosanne. THE KITE FLYER AND OTHER STORIES. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press, 1992.

Q: As soon as he woke, Martin went to look at the fish. Speckles seemed to know him. He looked right back. Speckles was big and beautiful. Martin wanted to show him off.

Martin <<>> Speckles.

✓ liked
washed
missed
held

Chardiet, Bernice, and Grace Maccarone. MARTIN AND THE TEACHER'S PET. New York: Scholastic Inc.

Q: Go to bed, Max. Go to bed, six tom cats. Goodnight, Max. Goodnight, Cats. Goodnight, Moonlight.

Everyone is going to <<>>.

✓ sleep
read
play
sing

Maslen, Bobby Lynn. MAX AND THE TOM CATS. 1987. Reprint, New York: Scholastic Inc., 1994.

Q: After he eats his breakfast, Wu Han goes out. Northport is a lovely town. He likes to walk down to the harbor. It is beautiful there. The harbor is filled with sailboats.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

He <<>> his walk.

✓ enjoys
skips
rushes
misses

Keller, Rosanne. HONORABLE GRANDFATHER. Syracuse: New Readers Press, 1990.

Q: Hold the bat lower, said Lisa. She ran over and showed Molly how to hold it. "Now I'll pitch again.

Lisa <<>> Molly.

✓ helped
left
carried
missed

Delton, Judy. THE POOPED TROOP. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1989.

Q: Looking out of the window, Jamie saw something move down by the water. He looked again and cried out, "Mom, look! A moose!"

He was <<>>.

✓ surprised
funny
quiet
sorry

Dixon, Peter L. THE HOMESTEADERS. 1974. Reprint, New York: Scholastic Inc.

Q: "Papa is coming. Papa is coming," he sang. "Papa comes every Friday, doesn't he, Mama?" Mama nodded her head. "Now, Pedro," she said. "Get up on your bed. I have to wash the kitchen floor. Stay up there till the floor is dry." Pedro watched Mama fill the pail with water. He watched the mop slide back and forth across the kitchen floor. It made the floor look so shiny. He was glad his

Mama was <<>>.

✓ cleaning
reading
cooking
riding

Sonneborn, Ruth A. FRIDAY NIGHT IS PAPA NIGHT. 1970. Reprint, New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1987.

Q: Here! Quick! Annie dashed toward a door off the hallway. She pushed the door open. The two of them stumbled into a dark, cold room. The door creaked shut behind them.

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

They were <<>>.

✓ hiding
sitting
climbing
tasting

Osborne, Mary Pope. MAGIC TREEHOUSE #9: THE KNIGHT AT DAWN. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1993.

Q: It was time for art. The children put their handprints on paper with paint.

They made pretty <<>> .

✓ pictures
letters
blocks
stacks

Alexander, Francie. BABY PIG AT SCHOOL. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1997.

Q: Trucks are motor vehicles. A vehicle is something that carries people or things. Some trucks are small in size. Others are monsters. They all run on wheels and have motors.

They <<>>.

✓ move
float
grow
burn

Selection from TRUCKS by Ray Broekel. Copyright © 1983 by ??. Reprinted by permission of Childrens Press, Inc., a division of Grolier Inc. All rights reserved.

Q: Daddy ran across the grass with the kite. I ran after him. The kite went up in the air. He put the ball of string in my hand.

He let me <<>> the kite.

✓ fly
paint
buy
sew

Wyeth, Sharon Dennis. GINGER BROWN: TOO MANY HOUSES. New York: Random House, 1996.

Q: When Arthur played hide-and-seek, friends always found him first. His friends thought his nose was funny. But what could he do about it? He could change his nose! That's what he could do

✓ correct answer
___ student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

He had a(n) <<>>.

✓ idea
story
fear
gift

Brown, Marc. ARTHUR'S NOSE. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976.

Q: "I know there is a uniform here," said Amelia Bedelia. And there was one. She took a nip here and a tuck there. Soon that uniform was just right.

It was a perfect <<>>.

✓ fit
day
time
color

Parrish, Peggy. PLAY BALL, AMELIA BEDELIA. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Q: Amelia Bedelia turned and went into the kitchen. She put some of this and a lot of that into a big pot. She put the pot on the stove. "There," she said. "I'll surprise them."

She was <<>>.

✓ cooking
running
sleeping
crying

Parish, Peggy. TEACH US, AMELIA BEDELIA. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc.

Q: Annie gave Jack the book. "Okay. You can go home. I'm staying," she said. She clipped the flashlight to her belt.

Annie told Jack to <<>>.

✓ leave
stop
write
draw

Osborne, Mary Pope. MAGIC TREEHOUSE #9: THE KNIGHT AT DAWN. 1993. Reprint, New York: Scholastic Inc., 1995.

Q: He said, "Your mom wears glasses. Your dad wears glasses. Your sister wears glasses."

✓ correct answer
— student answer

STUDENT TEST PRINTOUT

In fact, all of the <<>> wears glasses.

✓ family

team

group

class

Smith, Lane. GLASSES: WHO NEEDS 'EM? New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.

✓ correct answer

___ student answer

Appendix F

3rd and 4th Grade Comprehension Pretest

COMPREHENSION-PERSUASIVE

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: **Read each question carefully and circle the correct answer.**

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Every Classroom Should Have a Pet

I think every classroom should have a pet. Pets are good for everyone. Of course cats and dogs would not be good choices for classroom pets. Pets in a cage or aquarium would work better in the classroom. There are many pets that would be good for a classroom. Hamsters, fish, and guinea pigs are all good choices. A pet would have many good effects on students and teachers. Students would look forward to seeing the pet when they come to school each day. School lessons could involve the class pet, especially science lessons. There are many things to learn by observing an animal in its environment. A class pet would also teach students to share and to take on responsibility. What could be better than learning about animals and having fun at the same time?

1. According to the writer, the class pet would be great for _____.

   A. spelling lessons
   B. math lessons
   C. science lessons
   D. social studies lessons

2. What is the main idea of this story?

   A. Cats and dogs would be good classroom pets.
   B. The writer thinks every classroom should have a pet.
   C. Students should be allowed to bring all of their pets to school.
   D. Science is the most important subject in school.

3. The writer lists _____ as good choices for classroom pets.

   A. hamsters, fish, and mice
   B. hamsters, fish, and guinea pigs
   C. hamsters, cats, and guinea pigs
   D. hamsters, guinea pigs, and gerbils

4. The writer of this story thinks a pet in a classroom would be _____.

A. fun and educational
B. fun, but a great deal of hard work
C. not very fun, but very educational
D. fun, but dangerous

Appendix G

3rd and 4th Grade Comprehension Posttest

COMPREHENSION-PERSUASIVE

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: **Read each question carefully and circle the correct answer.**

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Every Classroom Should Have a Pet

I think every classroom should have a pet. Pets are good for everyone. Of course cats and dogs would not be good choices for classroom pets. Pets in a cage or aquarium would work better in the classroom. There are many pets that would be good for a classroom. Hamsters, fish, and guinea pigs are all good choices. A pet would have many good effects on students and teachers. Students would look forward to seeing the pet when they come to school each day. School lessons could involve the class pet, especially science lessons. There are many things to learn by observing an animal in its environment. A class pet would also teach students to share and to take on responsibility. What could be better than learning about animals and having fun at the same time?

1. According to the writer, the class pet would be great for _____.

   A. spelling lessons
   B. math lessons
   C. science lessons
   D. social studies lessons

2. What is the main idea of this story?

   A. Cats and dogs would be good classroom pets.
   B. The writer thinks every classroom should have a pet.
   C. Students should be allowed to bring all of their pets to school.
   D. Science is the most important subject in school.

3. The writer lists _____ as good choices for classroom pets.

   A. hamsters, fish, and mice
   B. hamsters, fish, and guinea pigs
   C. hamst[illegible], cats, and guinea pigs
   D. hamsters, guinea pigs, and gerbils

4. The writer of this story thinks a pet in a classroom would be _____ 92

A. fun and educational
B. fun, but a great deal of hard work
C. not very fun, but very educational
D. fun, but dangerous

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Appendix H

Parental Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Reading Strategies Study

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires me to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects my instruction. I have chosen to examine different reading strategies used in the classroom.

The purpose of this project is to implement a variety of reading strategies and assess their effectiveness. It will help your student develop additional reading strategies that can aid in reading comprehension.

Your permission allows me to include your student in the reporting of information for my project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential, and information included in the project report will br grouped as that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what I have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about your student will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about my project, please contact me at school.

If you agree to have your student participate in the project, please sign the attached statement and return it to me. I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the statement if you wish.

Sincerely,

PLEASE RETURN THE ATTACHED STATEMENT TO ME BY
AUGUST 31, 2001.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Reading Strategies Study

I, _____, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this project. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

Name of Minor _____

_____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian Date

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